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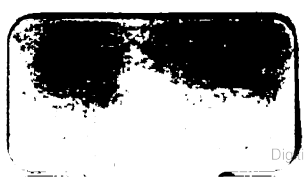
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Souls Resurgent

Marion Hamilton Carter



① 5382



Lydia T. Montez

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BY
MARION HAMILTON CARTER

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**TO
MY MOTHER**

KD 5382

SOULS RESURGENT

CHAPTER I

THE stage-driver's watch said a quarter to four. "Be home in an hour now," he'd told Dora shyly, swallowing the "you" because of some budding bashfulness that seemed to forbid a too personal address to this tall girl who had sat silently beside him all day. He felt relieved that he had dropped the remark casually, for she returned a vague "Yes?" and went on with her stare at the plains, taking no further notice of him. But his words had shot a pang through her as much of dismay as of gladness; only an hour now, and—home! What was it like—home? She had been asking herself that since early morning when she started with this uncouth boy of fifteen who carried the mail from Rock River to Garrett, up one day and down the next, on a rattling old buckboard. Was this the stage? She remembered—or thought she did—something so different in her childhood; prancing horses, and a bright red coach; romance. This was so horribly faded. Would all the rest of it—her mother and sister and brother—the ranch—the life—Wyoming—fail in the same way to square with her ideals? The plains vaulted by the great public sky, clear cobalt in the early morning, but frescoed with little smug clouds at noon, the sage-brush landscape stretching to the far horizon—all gave her a sense of chill, it was so raw, so unadorned. Far as the eye could see not even a shrub invited; the

vast gray-green ranges seemed to be saying: "For ages we have resisted man—we shall resist him to the end." She felt at first small, then puny, and without formulating the feeling to herself, put it in the question: "Was it always like this?"

She had been away from it ten years now, six at the "prep" school, four at Vassar, and this was the first homecoming in all that time. Her mother had hastened East once for a few weeks when Dora had had scarlet fever—that was in her second year of "prep," when she was fourteen; since then she had seen not a soul from home, not even a kodak view. But she had perpetually talked about "home in Wyoming" through the long years, and had even, at the suggestion of her English teacher in college, written several stories of Western life, based upon the flotsam and jetsam of a child's recollections—stories that her teacher had characterized as "bits of real life," but that were merely episodes, false in both color and perspective. And moving thus from episode to episode, the outlines filled in by her imagination, the crudities dissolved in forgetfulness, the ranch had become a name to conjure with; and even more so this new ranch to which she was now going and which she had never seen.

"Oh, Dora, I do envy you!" her bosom chum had cried, when they parted after commencement. "Think of going back to the wild, free life—the glorious West where you ride mustangs and women vote!"

Dora had felt enviable that day, but how different it seemed as she drew near the reality! It was not altogether disappointment, nor yet entirely the feeling of being repelled that had begun even while she was crossing Nebraska—it was rather the feeling that she didn't belong to it, nor it to her. It didn't catch and claim her, make her reach out her arms to it as did the rolling

wooded country of New York and Pennsylvania, or the New England coast, where she had spent most of her summers. This land lacked not only intimacy, but even common friendliness. She liked things to spring up of themselves; leafage seemed to her a sort of love; and nothing loved this land enough to come up of its own accord and brood green above the soil—all that was beautiful had to be coaxed. She was averse to things that had to be coaxed; they seemed niggardly; and that was the first adjective she consciously applied to Wyoming—it was “niggardly of graciousness.” With that she felt already homesick for the East and trees.

The wind had tumbled her thick, brown hair and blown it about her face, but except for that she was trim in her fresh white shirt-waist and black tailor suit—tall, athletic, the typical college girl. Even the noon-day glare had not taken from her a softness and grace of youth, femininity, and the cloistered life with its care of the little niceties. If anything, her surroundings accented the feminine both in her appearance and her feelings—that something breathing out from the landscape like the spirit of the plains, austere, scornful of little things. She shivered slightly before it; then as she caught sight of a long dirt roof, some deep, warm instinct met the shrinking and washed over it.

“Wyoming! Wyoming! My own land—my home!” she cried aloud, startling the driver.

“Tha’s it,” he acknowledged, stealing a glance at her. He found her rather overpowering, but after a moment’s hesitation he found courage to add: “They’ll see us in a minute and Polly’ll be runnin’ out fer to wave like she always does. Great girl, Polly is! I tell her I’m goin’ fer to marry her soon’s she’s growed up enough, so she needn’t to be makin’ no goo-goo eyes at no other fella.”

"You mean Polly—my little sister?" Dora shrank back obviously. In her mind she saw a tiny baby in long clothes—the only picture they had ever sent of her; yet even so, a baby wasn't to be familiarly joked over by this mat-haired, dirty lad, son of a saloon-keeper in Rock River, as he had been careful to inform her earlier, saying if she wanted any beer sent up, why, he hoped his folks would git her trade! Beer, indeed! She remembered that now and looked around at him.

"You ain't saw her yit, but she's a great girl, now lemme tell y'," he laughed, mistaking her gaze for that of friendly interest. "Why, she's got a half-dozen fellas a'ready waitin' fer her to grow up."

A flush of indignation and disgust darkened her cheeks with a tide rapidly running out to pallor at her impotence in showing this young cub his place, both in the world at large and in her particular world. Dora's look at him, which he had returned with open good-nature innocent of offense, might have rebuked him had he had sufficient intelligence to take it in, but all she could find to say was, "I hope you don't talk such nonsense to my sister," in a severe tone.

"Me? Why wouldn't I talk to her same's I talk to the rest o' the girls? And besides," he excused, now noticing the pursed lips, "I'm only a-kiddin' her—we ain't engaged noways."

"I should hope not!" said she dryly. "Considering that she's not ten yet. But even so, I don't think marriage is a subject to 'kid' a little girl on, is it?"

"Whadda yer raisin' her fer—fer to be a ole maid?" he retorted pugnaciously.

Her wit and his surly tone both warned her that if she answered either way, yes or no, he would get back at her with something impudent; and she sat silent, even wondering why she had allowed herself to take him

up so—he wasn't worth it. But there was something about everything since she had left the Pullman at Rock River that made her rebellious against familiarity of even this well-meaning sort. She was sorry she had said anything when he growled:

"If yer ain't raisin' her fer ter be a ole maid, she's gotta marry some fella, 'n' why not me—hey? Ain't I good enough fer yer folks, er what?"

Lad as he was, there was something now so vicious and vindictive in his smooth young face, on which the down of a beard had scarcely begun to show, that she drew away from him and felt her heart begin to beat. What might he not do or say to her in the midst of these lonely mountains? They were now descending the Divide from the top of which she had seen her home in the distance, and his horses needed all his attention; but he spared a moment to repeat: "Ain't I good enough fer yer folks—er you?—is that what ye're tryin' fer to git out o' yer system at me?"

"I'm trying to tell you," she answered, softening her tone all she could, "that I don't think marriage and 'fellas' are the right sort of ideas to put into a child's head. I didn't suppose you'd take my remarks personally, or as casting reflections on you."

"How else would I take 'em?"

"As I meant them."

"It's how I did take 'em, now you betcher! An' it's what yer meant, too—what anybody does mean when they says things like that—slick enough on the outside, but all full o' hints inside. Can't come right out with it like a man. 'Fraid. So they give yer hints. Well, I guess I'm as good as the next one—anybody thinks I ain't, I'd like to show 'em. Show one quick as I would the next." He muttered this last under his breath and gave her a glance.

She said nothing, though he was apparently waiting for a contradiction and after a moment demanded: "Well?" to which she replied sweetly, "What?" as if she hadn't quite heard.

"Well, *what?* Ain't that what ye're thinkin'—that I ain't good enough? Er was yer thinkin' it?"

"Why, I know nothing at all about you," she protested.

"Guess yer don't. But y' know one thing now—I'm good as the next one—anybody says I ain't, I'll show 'em where they're at."

She saw he was very angry by the way he lashed the horses, but she had scarcely a glimmer of comprehension of the cause—the desquamating egotism of the second-generation pioneer when fed on a mental diet of raw "equality"—and set her lips, wondering just what she had said while she held on tight to the seat which threatened to give way and pitch her out head foremost. He would have been glad if it had—it would "show her!" Fortunately it stayed on.

The horses dashed down the last of the grade and out on a wide stretch of desert land in the midst of which the alfalfa fields of the ranch glowed green and gave a comfortable sense of human effort and conquest. The buckboard came to a stop in the Little Laramie, the horses burying their noses in the rippling waters, and above their noises and the gurgle of the stream over its stones Dora heard her name shrilled in a childish voice: "Dody! Dody!"

A lank little girl parted the bushes on the other side of the river, and waved a red tam-o' shanter while a collie dog barked wildly, and almost in the same instant both disappeared.

The driver called out peremptorily: "Polly! You come back here! *Polly!*" with a malicious glance at

his companion. Here was another chance to show her a thing or two—*she* might look down on him, but he'd show her Polly didn't. He meant to kiss her when she climbed in.

But the child was gone.

"I guess you'll find out that kid has quite some idears of her own in her little head without me puttin' none in," he commented, starting the horses again. "She ain't no fool, if she is only nine—she knows who her friends is. I guess when you've lived out here a while——"

He didn't finish, for they had reached the door.

CHAPTER II

It is not without its pathos as well as its wisdom that Wyoming, giving women equal suffrage on becoming a State, also allowed seventeen causes for divorce: it tells the story of struggle against fearful odds, of life lived by makeshift, and too scanty of reward for man to make it even less tolerable by laws. Roughing it in tents and shacks, without the incentive of women and children to work for, soon leaves little but the natural man, the worst of him at that. The risks of wedlock are greater in a pioneer land than anywhere on earth.

Dora Feruseth was a product of a typical pioneer marriage of American mixed strains. Her father, a native of Maine, son of a Norwegian father and a Scotch mother, was forceful, grasping, and shrewd in seeing the main chance; a man scrupulously honest, though no one had ever called him generous; capable of unswerving devotion, but of little tenderness; and yet idealistic with the peculiar, austere romanticism that New England reserve and repression inevitably breed in imaginative natures. He worshipped but two things—land and probity of character. To him the land hunger, coming perhaps through some old viking tradition of the sea transmuted from conquest to possession, was, if not quite a religion, at least a philosophy of life. Land—square miles of it—not to use but to own: driven by this instinct, he had acquired homestead, desert claims, had leased school-sections, had bought right and left, as he could, grazing land, miles of sage-

brush, whole mountains of rock. Each time he stood on a new piece and said: "Mine!" something in his soul seemed to complete itself; he felt larger, steadier on his feet. He was the first rancher to introduce barbed-wire fencing. Cutting posts, digging post-holes, and stringing wire gave him the sense of conquest. When the fence was done, something inimical in the world at large seemed to have laid down arms against him and his.

And all the while he preached a sort of socialism and brotherhood of man. The government should own the railways and all the means of communication, he said, but never the land which must pass from father to son. To him the landowner was more a man than the landless—wealth alone could never give that peculiar investiture conferred by land, the earth upon which man moved and lived and from which he drew his nourishment. For this reason he despised the Jews—a people without land or the instinct for its ownership. From this instinct, he contended, had sprung man's desire for law and order, peace, self-respect, and respect for the rights of others, and, in fact, the idea of the brotherhood of man. Give people land, said he, and all the human virtues as distinguished from animal instincts rise spontaneously in their hearts; deprive them of its private possession, and they become "parasites on the body politic." Their parasitism, degenerating rapidly into trickery, scheming, fraudulent dealings to get a living from the landed, ended in the irresponsibility he saw creeping like a blight over the whole country—a blight that he believed could be checked by compelling every adult to own at least an acre and cultivate it with his hands, making that the test of franchise. In other words, "A man should buy his voting rights by the benefits he actually contributed

to human progress through improvements on land," and should have his taxes reduced, not increased, in exact proportion to the improvements. A kind of modified Tolstoyism he had worked out for himself and for years had tried to convert his neighbors to—in vain. Some of them called him "the preacher," but the majority called him a crank; and when he unfolded his scheme in their hearing would retort pugnaciously: "Well, lookka here—yer fergittin' the main thing: this here's a free country an' folks has gotta right to do as they damn please, now you betcher! If they don't want no land, *you* ain't got no right to choke it down their throats." James Feruseth closed such arguments by saying: "Some day I shall write a book, then people will understand and believe."—A gaunt figure with the eyes of a dreamer in the midst of a crowd of unbelievers and scoffers, always seeking reasons for man's virtues and failings; a freethinker imbued with a stern, Old World morality that won him the name of a hard, severe man whose word was good as his bond, but whose society no man courted.

At thirty-four, already set like a rock in his convictions, he had his first romance and married an Irish girl of twenty. She had come out for a lark to visit her brother, a young rancher trying his fortune, and to James Feruseth it seemed the descent of an angel in their midst. Dark, with the Irish complexion and curly hair, light-hearted, gay, romantic, generous to a fault, prepared to see heroes in every cowboy, she captured James Feruseth at first sight. That she had been reared a Roman Catholic didn't trouble him; that she was as irresponsible as a child, he didn't know. She was sunshine on the stern soil of his life; he wooed and married her within two months, and took her home to his cabin in the hills—one of those "marriages of opposites" that are said to

insure success. But the result was the slow crumbling of an irresponsible, pleasure-loving nature in the presence of an indomitable will. *Her* nature was formed for the outpourings of joy and affection, not for the prolonged and arduous constructive activities of a pioneer world, and certainly not for "speculations that led nowhere" on the origin of human virtue. She had been proud of James, and respected him tremendously—in the early days he had appealed to her imagination, keyed to concert pitch by the picturesqueness of Wyoming life—yet almost from the first something about him chilled her, and what little love she had under the glamour could not warm away the sense that he was inaccessible to her. How soon her blandishments ceased to win him! How little her blarnies swerved him from his path! As she gave up trying to move him she gave up all along the line; drifted on the easy way; let all but necessary things go in the house; became a slattern in her person and a sloven in her speech, picking up the poor English she heard around her. In less than a year she and her husband had spiritually parted company and knew it; her Roman Catholic teaching and his moral principles held them together in a conventional disunion—the pioneer tragedy that Wyoming had provided for with unlimited opportunity for divorce. It was the inevitable disruption of a bond purely personal by the forces within them that were racial.

Dora, the first born of this ill-assorted marriage, had inherited everything from her father—she was his child, except for a streak of generosity that was still far more intellectual than emotional. Idealistic like him, with the same uncompromising probity, her innate tendency to set up standards for herself had been developed by her college life into a sort of primitive Puritanism with its whips and spurs, its aspirations

toward perfection, intellectual and moral; only—she had shifted her plane from the material to the mental—his land hunger had been transmuted in her to hunger for knowledge. More broad-minded than he, she was just as grasping in her way: art, literature, science—she had snatched at each; she had never got enough. She was greedy—and gloried in it! She had never been able to settle to one small field and till it for profit. There were so many things to know, each one of which “gave you a broader outlook.” “A broad outlook,” and a “purpose in life” were just then her shibboleths.

But what was to be her purpose in life? She had dreamed those words all through college, and still she didn't know. She was always devoting herself to some specialty in the belief that this was to be her “purpose,” her life work, only to feel the call of a wider world—“the call of the viking's blood to the high seas,” she termed it, and her father's death in the middle of her senior year found her still undecided. It had been his positive wish, and one of the last he mentioned, that she should stay on and graduate—nothing must interfere with her getting her diploma after all those years of hard work, and now she had raced home to the ranch—for the summer?—for a year or two?—for a life work?—for *what*? She had been asking that question from the moment she boarded the train at Poughkeepsie, and the only answer she had been able to come to was, “For duty—and for common decency,” which said very little about a “profession” or a “life purpose.” Of course she “owed something” to her mother, to her little sister, to Eric, who was nineteen, and must be a young man, though she remembered him only as a curly-headed little chap, pretty, affectionate, irresponsible, fun-loving, naughty—his mother all over in dispo-

sition. . . . But how entirely different everything was from what she had expected it was going to be!

Dora and her mother faced each other in the big kitchen-living-room. Polly, one lank little leg over the arm of her mother's chair, the other gently kicking her mother's skirts, sat in her mother's lap staring mercilessly at her sister. All three felt constrained, as if they ought to be intimate, yet couldn't. Dora, worn out with her journey and the emotions of the last few hours, was longing to go to bed; longing, really, to get away by herself, and think out what this home-coming meant; but she feared to seem cold and neglectful by not staying and talking as long as her mother wished. Clapsed in her mother's loving arms, the girl had been conscious of a burst of love and sympathy; but that had died out when the crudely served supper was put on the table. Polly had stared and stared, jabbing her food and getting it to her mouth hit or miss, spilling long worms of spaghetti on her clean apron with perfect unconcern, slobbering her tea, her fingers plunged into her cup. Dora had felt first disgust, then a veritable passion of antagonism; and unable to bear it longer—thinking, indeed, that if this were the common custom of meals she had better find it out at once—had remonstrated as gently as she could: "Mother, why do you let Polly sit that way at table and eat so?"

Her mother looked around at the child—Polly's feet were on the rung of her mother's chair, and one elbow rested on the table. At the moment she had just speared a huge forkful of spaghetti, had hit her cheek instead of her mouth, and had tumbled the spaghetti into her lap. Her mother saw the accident, yet looked back at her elder daughter with a sort of bewilderment, asking: "Why, Dody dear, what's she

doing to make a fuss over? Accidents will happen with any child, and she's only a little girl, and so glad to see you she can't think of anything else. Ain't you, lovens?"

Polly, with tears starting to her eyes, buried her head on her mother's shoulder. Mrs. Feruseth picked spaghetti off herself and Polly, murmuring: "Never mind, darlin'—mamma don't care! She's mamma's own girl and couldn't help it. Faces can be washed—so can hands—and a little spaghetti . . . there's plenty for everybody, so don't worry." With this she brushed the remainder of the mess to the floor, calling: "Here, Rover, come lick it up. There—eat it!"

So that was the way of it—Polly behaving like a little savage, and her mother taking her part! Dora wished she hadn't spoken, and yet—supposing she hadn't, what then? "I ought to have had more tact, though," she admitted to herself. However, she had never quite made up her mind on tact. Her nature abhorred all forms of concealment and ambiguous positions, and tact always savored of ducking the issues. In this case, to say nothing was certainly to duck an issue squarely confronting her: a child of nine permitted to wallow in her food like an infant of two, and to stare a person out of countenance. So this was—*home*!

And yet there was a piteous look in the weak little face, as it hid in its mother's shoulder, that went to Dora's heart and made her a little ashamed of herself for speaking, and as they left the table she held out her hand to Polly with a kindly: "Never mind, you'll soon learn."

But the child drew away and clung to her mother, who pushed her forward with, "Go to Dody, darlin'—she didn't mean anything," that aroused all the girl's antagonism afresh. She did mean a great deal! To

any self-reliant nature that stands by its guns, to be explained away is intolerable. And Dora felt it here doubly so—wrong to herself and to the child who must be corrected and properly trained if she were to take any sort of a place in the world. Was it possible her mother didn't care?

Conversation limped along, touching now on local affairs, now on college, mother and daughters ill at ease, Polly staring, but ready, at a glance from her sister, to drop her face for refuge in her mother's bosom. At last to change the current Dora asked: "Are you sure Eric knew I was coming to-day? I think it's so queer he's not at least home, and I thought, of course, he'd be down at Rock River to bring me up."

"Eric—yes, he knew—" Her mother seemed a little uncertain of what she ought to say. "But he's shy of a college-graduate sister—I guess that's why." She hugged Polly, bending to kiss her cheek. "He's off most of the time, anyway," she added in extenuation, since Dora said nothing and seemed to be blaming him silently. "He didn't know the exact day, or the train you was to come by. He wasn't here when your telegram come."

"That's because he's runnin' after Addie Rohmer all time," contributed Polly in a shrill voice, and her mother, with a slight frown as if this had been one of the things she had meant to leave out, explained: "You don't remember her—she's since your time out here. Her father was that Jew down to Laramie and had the general store and four saloons, and married that French girl. When he died they sold out everything and come back upon their homestead to live. He didn't leave anything like what folks thought he had, everything was eaten up alive with mortgages, for he'd mortgaged the first business to start the second, and kept on that way right through, so all there was clear was that one saloon

down to Rock River. His son's got that, but he can't do much with it against Wilson's. It was his boy, Shadwell, brought you up to-day on the stage."

"Shaddy Wilson's a nawful nice boy—I guess he's 'bout my best fella—'cept Eric," contributed Polly, a theme her mother amplified by saying: "He's the best one of that bunch—I got no use for any of the rest of that outfit, every last one of 'em is up to something on the side, and all in politics——"

"Well, tell her 'bout Addie Rohmer," Polly commanded at the mention of politics and fearful lest her mother get launched on a subject of inaccessible depths. Her mother had thought to avoid further mention of Addie Rohmer, but seeing no way out of it, explained: "She's the daughter—must be at least twenty-five, but she goes on—dresses and rides about with the boys—like a girl of fifteen."

"Eric's with her most the whole time, but I guess Dody'll keep him to home now she's come," Polly dropped in. "Papa couldn't keep him home—but he wasn't goin' there like he's went since papa died, and papa told him if he ever married Addie——"

"S-sh, Polly—you know nothing about it," warned her mother.

"I know *all* about it—Eric tole me hisself, so there!"

Polly put her small skinny forefinger under her mother's chin, pushing her mouth shut just as she was about to speak. "Eric says he likes her, an' *I* like her—so don't *you* say anything against Addie. And 'sides, she give me a snow-white kitten with long hair that got drowned in the milk-pail, and she says she's goin' to gimme another when her ole mother cat has 'em again, an' that'll be soon I do hope, fer I want another kitten."

She spoke to her mother and then looked shyly at

Dora, who sat thinking. "Rohmer? What do I remember about that name?" It was something she had heard her father say—he was always prejudiced against Jews; he had derived his intolerance of them from a process of pure reasoning based on his quaint theories of landownership as the source of virtue and the basis of civilization. And this man Rohmer—oh, yes—her father had warned people at some political meeting that if they once let the Jews get a foothold in Wyoming, pioneer democracy was doomed. . . . Having just created something of a situation on the subject of Polly's shortcomings, Dora was wondering if tact allowed her to inquire along the line of her brother's, when Polly broke out: "Well, I don't care if ole Rohmer was a bad man an' cheated folks all over—Addie ain't, and Addie can't be blamed fer what her father done, an' Eric says so. She didn't make her father, an' she did gimme that white kitten, and Eric likes her an' I like whoever Eric likes, so that settles it."

"That will do now, darlin'," said her mother. "We won't argue it—Dody's tired and I'm sure she wants to go to bed and get rested after her long drive, for she ain't used to it as we are. Get the lamp for her."

Dora rose with alacrity, glad she hadn't spoken.

Alone at least in her stuffy little room, the white-washed logs making it seem like a prison cell, she pressed close to the window and looked out into the starlit night. Scores of mosquitoes hummed against the other side of the screen trying to reach her, symbolical of what her life now meant, she thought—if she stayed at home. But could this be—home?—that word she had conjured with for so many years. No, she would presently wake up in her own bed back in the dear old building with its hallowed traditions. The grounds, the trees so gently inviting, the lake, the life, the stir and

interest, the emulation of work and play, companionship, sympathy, inspiration—that was home, *reality*; and this was a dream of a world that was not her world. A dream, and yet mixed with it a reality—love, and a kind of pity for her mother—how she had aged!—and for this little wild thing that called her sister, the blood ties . . . and above those solid feelings, disillusion and disgust and antagonism toward all the easy-going makeshifts now surrounding her. “It’s incredible!” thought she. “I’ll stay here till things are straightened out, then I’ll go back to my life-work. I don’t belong here—I don’t—I don’t! It isn’t any of it *mine*.” Yet no sooner had she resolved to flee to her own world, than there came over her the memory of her mother’s embrace and her heartfelt, “Thank God you’ve come to me, Dody—I’ve been aching for you!” and the girl could only say to herself: “Oh, poor, dear mother! What a time she must have had since father’s death.”

Outside, the sheep-dog, Rover, was patrolling the house; every once in a while he came scrambling past her window as if in pursuit of a shadowy intruder, gruffly remonstrating, “Woof! Woof!” Sometimes he stopped to bark defiantly, as if he had got the intruder at bay and begged assistance in capturing him. It made her feel creepy, he was so sure of those invisible things he drove away. Inside the house were only herself and her mother and Polly; the three ranch-hands slept in the bunk-house a little way off. Her mother had given them their supper early that she might have her daughter to herself that first evening. She heard the squeak of springs under her mother’s restless turning, and words whispered between her and Polly—they slept together, but were evidently too excited to sleep; and from the outside there came occasionally the stamp of horses in the corrals and a long-

drawn snort as if they, too, were alive to hidden things. A cow-bell continually tinkled away out on the range—a mournful sound in the night, telling of one creature plodding along, nose to the ground, industriously hunting a few mouthfuls of sustenance. The awful loneliness! Not another house for miles; and her mother and Polly had been alone there for weeks since her father died. Why hadn't Eric stayed with them? What was the mystery about him? What myriads of stars! What silence they kept!

“But I'm dreaming it all,” she whispered. “This can't be my home—my life-work.”

CHAPTER III

MRS. FERUSETH had long since adopted the maxim: "We must take things as they come and make the best of them." Makeshift was as much her philosophy as a habit; *laissez-aller* had an almost religious—and meritorious—significance to her. And against this, youth, self-confident, puissant, clear-eyed to the inner meaning of that excuse, strong in the faith that nothing in life is inevitable unless the will accede, and inspired by ideals to be striven for in human conduct, was suddenly set in bold relief in the person of Dora, her mother's pride, her flesh and blood, but an almost unknown being to the mother who bore her; racially as alien to her as James Feruseth had proved alien to the gay, emotional Irish girl of nearly a quarter of a century ago—"a James in petticoats," thought her mother presently, but missed the point of difference that was to make Dora's destiny a defeat or a victory: the common male selfishness together with Old World ideas of a wife's duty that had allowed husband and father to enforce acquiescence in his plans without a qualm of conscience.

Morning thus found her, if anything, keened to the antagonisms she had felt the night before. The sense of dreaming it all had lessened; the sense of a grotesque, "impossible" reality had increased with the light of day.

"Oh, it's impossible that my mother and sister should live like this!" she snapped while trying to see her whole face and hair in a mirror broken right down the centre. How well she remembered that mirror now

that she saw it again; and how completely she had forgotten the way she used to play hide-and-seek with her face in it. As a child it had amused her; but now as part of decent living! And it was still here after all these years. It was the same with the agate basin on her wash-stand, and the glass lamp whose raw, unshaded flame had lighted her to bed, the puncheon floor whose only covering was a worn antelope-skin in front of the uncomfortable bed. Thus the "simple life" showed her its skeleton as the crude and inconsequent life—merely a high-sounding title wreathed with sweet pastoral significances, under cover of which indolence whined out its indifference alike to shabby mediocrity and worthy effort at excellence. Nothing that mattered to her, mattered to her family—that was the situation as she saw it. "And yet they're well off—they could have nice things—common decencies—if they wanted them." But cotton towels—cracked mirrors! . . . She manoeuvred in front of the glass to get a partial view of her person while she carefully lifted her fresh white skirt, running her hands up under it to pull her shirt-waist down over her full bosom and lay each pleat in place under her snug belt. She was not precisely in mourning—her father had always objected to it—but she was wearing only black and white, and its tailored severity, unrelieved by any touch of color except in her face, made her look austere, almost *spirituelle*.

Her mother opened the door without knocking, the words, "Breakfast's ready," on her lips; but the sight of the tall, beautiful girl all in white checked them in the saying. Something gushed up in the mother's heart that burst out in the cry, "Dody—my little Dody! My beautiful Dody—grown a princess!" and she gathered the girl in a warm, voluminous embrace, kissing her on both cheeks, and crooning: "My darlin'—my

own darlin' child! And I have you back home at last after all these weary years of waiting. Many's the time I've feared I'd never live to see this glad day! Oh, Dody, I'm so happy I could cry."

The girl felt the warmth and softness of her mother's body pressed to hers; thrilled with the sense of it, and of the love poured out to her, and of the sense of her possession by the deepest right in the world—birth—of that unstinted love, so generous, so uncritical, so satisfied just to give its all to its offspring. It was wonderful, the feeling of that elemental tie—an exalted moment; but the next instant a wave of repugnance rolled over her as she saw that her mother was dressed in an old calico wrapper not even belted in, open down the front and showing underneath a soiled gray corset and knitted undervest of the cheapest sort, her hair not yet brushed but only twisted up and held in place by a couple of hairpins—a dowdy slattern, behind whom, peeking through the crack of the door, stood Polly, one hair-ribbon in which she had evidently slept dangling on her shoulder, the other, matted and rumpled, perked saucily over her ear. Still barefoot, she was dragging up on her shoulders a soiled gingham dress, rumpled, too, as if it had been slept on, while open-mouthed and wide-eyed she stared, consumed with curiosity, her small, precocious face an incarnate question-mark.

"Where does she get that frightful stare?" thought Dora. "And doesn't she know enough not to come into a private room just because the door is open?" Polly had by this time reached the centre of the floor. But Polly appreciated no such distinctions—privacy, indeed, meant nothing to either her or her mother, since they never wished to commune with their own thoughts but with those of others, and the little hesitation she showed as she came step by step into the room was not

due to lack of invitation from the powers in control at the moment, but in order to gaze her fill. Having taken in the picture presented, she exclaimed: "Is that the way you dress up every day *for common* at college? My but you do look—*grand!*"

"I don't call myself much dressed up," smiled Dora.

"My!—but *I* do! And ain't you—*pretty!*" Her little face was now alight with appreciation. She was proud and thrilled with some new sense of the exquisite and the complete suddenly awakening within her consciousness. Then she sighed happily: "And you're my own sister. I didn't think you'd be like that. I thought——"

She broke off, and Dora, touched by this as she had been by her mother's outpouring, asked: "What did you think I'd be like?"

"Like Addie Rohmer, and bring me a kitten," Polly flashed back without stopping to consider her answer. "But you ain't a bit like *her*—oh, *no!*" She took a turn about her sister to survey her from all angles, repeating, "Oh, no—" several times. "You're ever and ever so much more—so much more—" and there she stopped.

Her mother smiled fondly at the two of them, her first-born and her baby, beside whom, had they but known it, her husband in her life had been the shadow of a gaunt, forbidding rock, and asked indulgently: "So much more—*what?*"

"Oh, so much more differenter than what we made her up to be like when she come."

"You've evidently been thinking about me a good deal," commented Dora, amused more than she was touched.

"Oh, we have! Me an' mamma made you up most every night—we talked 'bout you more'n anybody in this whole word, an' she told me all what you was like

when you was big as me. But the way we got you—it ain't near as nice as what you are! Not near as pretty an' sweet."

Dora laughed, and there was a faint note of embarrassment in it—she wasn't used to these personalities, these ardent looks of loving admiration, and all at once felt shy; but she managed to say: "I don't claim to be any too sweet, my dear! And I've certainly changed since mother saw me last. Why, I was only in 'prep' school then!" The era before college seemed prehistoric to her.

"Well, of course you've changed," admitted Polly judicially. "We knew you would—you had on short dresses like me then. But that was all we had to go on, so we had to make you up out of our heads after that; and it ain't so awful easy to make anybody up outa yer head and gittum *right*, now lemme tell y'," she finished in an excusatory tone.

"Apparently, I don't fit the pattern at all! What a pity!"

"Oh, you're nicer—ever 'n' ever so much nicer!" cried Polly warmly, thinking she detected disappointment in her sister's tone. "If you don't fit, it's 'cos we couldn't 'a' made you up as sweet an' pretty as you are. You're the sweetest thing in this whole world, an' you're my sister—my very own sister, goin' ta live with us forever an' ever."

The ring of joy, the open-hearted sincerity, the look of admiration and love, and deeper than that, the call of blood to blood, sent the warm wave leaping in Dora's heart and she caught the child up in her arms, kissing both cheeks and repeating with feeling: "And you are my own, my very own little sister!"

In a spasm of affection she felt the warm, yielding little body and clinging arms; but as she set the child

down, her gingham dress, into which she had only loosely thrust her arms, slipped off and fell to the floor, revealing underneath—rags. Nothing disconcerted—not even conscious of the soils and tears she had thus exhibited to a critical and disgusted eye—she roughly hauled the dress in place and turned her back to her mother with a peremptory “Hurry ’n’ button me up quick so’s we can git breakfast ’n’ go out. I wanta show her everything,” and her mother sat down meekly to her task with the air of one daily accustomed to it.

“Can’t you button yourself?—a big girl like you!” asked Dora in some astonishment.

Polly shook her head, and jerking it to indicate her mother, announced: “She always does—I dunno how. ’Sides, it’s too much trouble squirming yer arms up yer back tryin’ to find a button mebbe ain’t there at all.”

Her eyes danced and she thought she had said something rather bright, and expected Dora to laugh; but in Dora something seemed to sink. For the first time in her life, her self-help ideals had come into contact with the active-indolent type of character that scurries about at top speed, but has no climb to it. Polly ought to be protesting, “Let me do it myself!” and her mother ought to be training her to self-help now. As Dora watched her mother the words shot through her: “A mush of concessions!” Her face clouded, and noticing it Polly inquired: “Didn’t mamma button you when you was a little girl? Naughty mamma—I’ll spank you if you didn’t.”

Mrs. Feruseth glanced up over the restless shoulder at the tall girl in front of her and smiled affectionately, thrilling again with maternal pride in her two darlings, though she admonished Polly: “You mustn’t be saucy to your mamma. What’ll Dody think to hear you talk

like that? She'll blame me for being too indulgent and not makin' you do things the way you ought."

She, too, had noticed the cloud on Dora's face, and along with it had come a shadowy recollection of the supper-table episode: disapproval seemed to be in the atmosphere just then. Dora tried to smile, but felt awkward—caught in the act, as it were.

"'You ought'—to hurry up," cried Polly, mimicking her mother. "An' if you don't I will spank you, so there!" To show how much she meant it, she squirmed around suddenly, undoing all the buttons, and planted a kiss on the end of her mother's nose, informing her in a sweet, joyously cajoling way, "You know you always gotta do what I say, you dear ole lovesy mommsie," that took what little wind there was out of her mother's sails and made her return the kiss on both Polly's fevered cheeks before turning her about to rebutton her with a pleading request: "Do, please, stand still, darlin', or mamma'll never get this done."

"Oh, I can't—I'm in such a hurry to take Dody out. I hope Eric comes home to-day—I want him to see Dody. He's my best young man fella—I'm goin' ta marry him when I grow up."

This time her mother shot an amused look over her at Dora, as one enlightened woman to another, while Polly rattled on: "One reason he's my best fella is he always brings me pounds an' pounds of candy every time he comes home from Rock River, so I love him. An' you know why he didn't come home las' night? He's afraid of *you*! Ain't he too silly? He wouldn't believe what me 'n' mamma told him—that you was the sweetest, prettiest——"

Her mother said: "There!" for the buttons were done, and gave her a gentle push in the direction of Dora.

"And you are!" Polly caught her sister's hand, kissing it and pressing it to her heart. It was the wonder-moment of her life—beauty and possession had both dawned on her soul. She was gasping with excitement and longing as she cried, dragging her sister out of the room: "Oh, come! Oh, hurry! I want you to see all my things—see all what's on the ranch, 'n' the beautiful horse we got fer you to ride." Thus she articulated the stirrings of that deep instinct prompting us to show and share, and by invisible threads of common interests knit the beloved one closer to our lives.

The ranch-hands had had their breakfast and gone to work, leaving the table a mess. The white linen cloth, used the night before in Dora's honor, had been laid away for a future occasion, and a brown oilcloth, worn and smeary, took its place over the long table that would seat sixteen and could be stretched for thirty—a depressing extension at best for the use of three people, and now fairly disgusting. For the men had had fried trout and had been careful to shove the skeletons onto the table in order to wipe up their plates with the hunks of bread that, thus smeared and flavored with all the articles of the meal, made their customary desert. Two cats had jumped on the end of the table nearest the door, through which they had been watching their chance and, crunching and growling, were disputing remains.

"Oh, you cats!" screamed Polly, dropping Dora's hand, and diving at them with loud "Scats!" before which they fled with an experienced air while she called the dog to "sick 'em." "They are the *worst* ole thieves! I beat 'em 'n' beat 'em, but it don't learn 'em—they're up again soon's my back's turned."

Mrs. Feruseth had taken no notice either of the table or the cats, but was hurriedly preparing fresh coffee, sliding the frying-pan forward to the hot part of the range to cook the beautiful trout she had laid aside for Dora, and stuffing more fat pitch-pine sticks into the fire, whose sooty smoke was rolling upward in the still air and scattering back on the roof a rain of black dust particles.

"Here's another change since you were here," she said, holding up the fish for Dora to see. "The justice had the river stocked from the State hatchery. If only those remittance men from Barrett's didn't fish the river out all the time, we pioneers who made the country what it is would have a plenty. But this is a beauty—Eric got it."

"Yes, it's a fine fish," said Dora absently; but she turned away and looked back at the table with a sudden thought that filled her with dismay: she had promised to have Lennie Allison, her bosom college chum, and her brother, a Harvard junior, out for the summer if they would come, which wasn't yet decided. She had even offered him hunting with her brother; have them—out—to—this! She had spent the previous summer with the Allisons in Morristown—refined, gently bred people, probably not nearly so well off as her own parents, but "living decently" according to their means and tastes with two servants and a man on the place, and the picture of their well-appointed table, the trim waitress tiptoeing about, had risen abruptly, exploding in an inward "Heavens! What would they say to—*this*!—and to be asked to sit down here and eat!" Lennie might—for the lark, once; but Lennie's brother! Still, it was neither Lennie nor her brother that Dora thought of at the moment, but Lennie's mother in her white Fayal cap, so serene and elegant, a gentlewoman

growing old gracefully and radiating the atmosphere of the chosen and cherished. She had been Dora's ideal of a mother and unconsciously she had been building her own upon that ideal, and her own—a slattern, half dressed, not yet washed and combed, her bare feet thrust into loose, old slippers that slapped the floor at every step, and frying fish! "And she has been round that way before the men!" thought Dora. Her face burned with shame, the most poignant shame the young are capable of—mortification for a parent—because it drags so into the very roots of affection and respect. A parent's shame for a child is generally softened with excuses or grief, but youth seldom has these palliatives. Its social sense is more robust and critical; social mortification cuts quicker flesh with keener strokes. It is the natural instinct of all healthy-minded young people to feel pride in their forebears. Here in the garish light of morning, projected against the picture of the mother who had been her ideal, the surge of feeling caught her unawares and something seemed to cry out to her: "Go—go—go! Go back to your own kind—to your own life! If you don't, you'll be dragged down to this level." Dora looked back at her own mother, clattering about and working so hard to get breakfast for her and thought, "Oh, how can I think such cruel thoughts! Oh, how can I respect her and love her as I ought?" experiencing at the moment of her self-castigation a disgust that seemed to make love impossible, and under it all, another still small voice kept asking, "What would they think of this, if they could see the home you've boasted so about? What would they think—what would they say?" and she answered with fierce bitterness: "They'll never think or say, for they'll never get the chance to see it!" With those words, one part of her life ended and a vista

closed—a vista into the future peopled with the friends of her past. The old life and the new were parted asunder with a stroke—all that she had here she must find here.

Polly came cavorting back from a raid on a cat she had spied peeking in at the window, and seeing her sister's stare fixed on the table, glanced in the same direction and experienced an illumination of her little understanding: the table was nasty and not fit for the idol to sit down at; and to serve the idol, she gathered up the remaining bones and scraps and slung them through the open door at the chickens, calling in her shrill voice at its loudest, "Come, chook—chook—chook!" aiming the fish heads with astonishing accuracy at the squawking, bustling chickens; then, wiping her hands on her dress, she flopped down at the table, exclaiming petulantly: "Oh, mamma, *do* hurry up—you're so slow. I don't want any breakfast anyway—only some coffee."

Mrs. Feruseth set the platter of sizzling fish on the table, and brought a great pitcher of cream from the commissary. Dora came out of her bitter revery and sat down feeling choked, as if she couldn't swallow a mouthful; guilty; mean; defeated in some mysterious inner righteousness she couldn't name—just defeated in herself. Never before had she been through such an eruption, and she didn't understand it—this was a new Dora to her, a mean, ungrateful Dora. She felt she ought to beg her mother's pardon; it was horrible to think so about your own mother, horrible—a treachery to all that was the highest; to one's own ideals! Her mother was at the moment handing the cream-pitcher, thick, yellow cream smeared all over the outside, and at the same time turning to look at Polly who had spiked a fish and was holding it, fork and fingers, and biting into it greedily, she whispered: "Eat it nicely,

darlin'; mamma wants you to be a little lady with your food, now Dody's home."

She was suddenly experiencing a new feeling—she wanted her baby to appear well in the eyes of another. Up to that moment, her maternal loyalty and indulgence had held her children, just because they were her children, beyond criticism. And what was Dora thinking of Polly—and of herself? From almost the first moment, her mother had been conscious of constraint in Dora's presence, but laid it last night to their being strange to each other after all the years of separation. Yet along with the constraint there bloomed in the mother's heart an intense yearning—she wanted to please this statuesque young person and make her feel at home; to be, and to be recognized as the same dependable source of nourishing happiness she was to Eric and Polly. On the impulse of this, she laid her hand on Dora's and spoke with warm emotion.

"Oh, Dody darlin', to see you here in your place at table at last—you don't know what it means to me! I'm only afraid I'll wake up and find it all a dream and you back at college thousands of miles away. I've lived for this day for years. As Polly said—we've been makin' you up out of our heads, but we never got you half as good and beautiful and splendid as you really are."

Tears sprang to Dora's eyes that she had hard work to keep back—love, sympathy, appreciation, self-blame, self-contempt, all seething in her at once.

"I'm glad to be home with you," she said almost inaudibly. She spoke with a humble heart, shamed by its own shortcomings.

CHAPTER IV

THE wonder-moments of childhood are often more potent of mischief than we suspect. Out of the new appreciation springs a new bashfulness: the largeness of the idol measures the smallness of the servitor, and the childish heart, when not laid utterly in the dust by the sense of its unworthiness, strives to replenish its sense of dwindling personality by self-assertion, braggadocio, audacious pertness; and much that grown-ups in their blindness take for showing off and naughtiness, is only "whistling" to keep the courage up.

Polly was "whistling," though nobody knew it, for she was beginning to ask herself: "I wonder what Dody thinks of me?" A person so immaculate, so beautiful, so *different* from everybody else must have different thoughts about you from the thoughts you had hitherto met in the course of a much-loved existence, and Polly had already experienced a certain opprobrium in those thoughts. To ward off more of it, to create a little appreciation she could turn to her own account and cover the bashfulness that threatened to overwhelm her, she threw herself into a miniature orgy of showing off, racing away as fast as her little legs could fly, racing back to snatch her sister's hand and kiss it wildly, until Dora, unused to such ebullitions and not in the least understanding the cause, remonstrated gently, "My dear—my dear! I thought you were taking me out to show me the ranch. I don't want to run—I want to see things."

Polly wasn't quite sure whether she had been reproved

or encouraged; but as she preferred to think the latter and could serve the idol at the same time, she deposited several kisses in rapid succession on her sister's hand and artlessly inquired: "Which 'ud you druther see first, my horse or my cow? My cow's worth the most, but I like my horse best, so I druther show him first. He ain't a young horse," she added with engaging frankness, "though he ain't a *nauful* old one—he can still keep atop of his legs if you don't run him too much. An' he's so *good*! Papa used to say he was the only true Christian in the whole county. It's why I love him so, fer some o' the other horses is so *mean*—jes' the most ornery cusses you ever seen in your whole life, an' nobody but Eric can't ride 'em a-tall."

Dora looked at the child astonished and thought, "Such English!" but forbore to correct it, feeling the little loving hand clinging to hers. She swung the hand gayly, quickening her steps and thinking: "It will all come right after a while. I must have tact—there's my great failing—lack of tact; but mother loves me so much she'll be glad to bring things up to the mark and make home and Polly what they should be."

Out in the bright air, the sweep of meadow-land about her—her father's land as far as her eye could reach—her spirits rose rapidly. Youth of her kind loses faith in both God and man before it loses faith in its own powers to conquer and mould the world to its own purposes. To its inexperience there is no imperfection past remedy if one only sets oneself faithfully to the task, and besides, one didn't have to be doing tasks every minute of life, and not when there was so much—so gloriously, wonderfully much—to see of one's father's land. Drinking in the sunshine, she hastened forward blithely until she heard her name called and turned to see her mother hurrying up; noticed that she had done her hair and

put on a fairly respectable-looking dress. Mrs. Feruseth had stayed behind to clear away the breakfast things and change her wrapper, both of which operations she not infrequently left until afternoon, or even the next day if she had a large baking on hand or a neighbor happened along; but something had whispered: "I must fix up more now Dody's home from college," though she had no idea of the shocking impression her general dilapidation had made on her daughter and would have been only hurt, not enlightened if she had known. Like all the old-timers of the pioneer generation, Mrs. Feruseth had been so long away from a world where niceties count that she had lost not merely the need for them for herself, but almost the sense of them in others.

"Oh, Dody darlin'," her mother was a little short of breath, and still fussing with buttons she had not stopped to finish before the glass, "I had to see that you're really here! I can't believe it even yet, and when you'd been out a few minutes the house seemed so *empty*!"

She took the girl's hand in both hers, giving her that same look of melting pride and affection, untinged with the least thought of self; but in spite of it, seeing her mother for the first time in the pitiless glare of the outdoor sun, Dora could not help noticing both the age and the weakness of her face, the small, impotent nose, the loose, sensitive mouth; a face all feeling, but no will-power. It had been a charming face once, lit up by gay spirits and innocent fun; but its freshness and vivacity were gone; and Dora was far too unilluminated to appreciate the dim, mystical beauty of middle age, the self-free looseness of line and texture moulded and painted by long years of indulgent affection unstintedly poured out upon its children: the beauty of faded and

cherished things. Instead, she felt chilled in her moral ideals of strength and firmness. The chill passed in a few seconds but not without having struck its note that was to recur again and ever more loudly as their two lives flowed on and intermingled.

Mrs. Feruseth had been unconscious of the chill—she saw before her only youth and beauty—*her child*, her very own, and in the reflected glory of the vision, her face had both lighted and softened and she continued stroking and squeezing Dora's hand while asking: "Have you seen the colts? We have the finest bunch of three-year-olds we've had in all the time we've been breeding. Eric has two picked out for you to ride—he's breakin' them very gentle. There's no one in the country can break a horse like Eric can when he's a mind to. The horses ought to be down in the big pasture the other side of the river. But I don't know as you better take the time to go out there this morning, Dody—you got all summer to see colts in, and we've got to talk things over. . . . The will, you know . . . business . . . and there's some papers to sign—we got to ride over to the justice's. . . . I don't understand it at all—it's the strangest thing ever happened . . . I didn't want to say anything last night, you were so tired. I made up my mind before you got here to wait till you had a night's sleep. . . . Mebbe you thought it queer, me not speakin' of the will, but that's why. We'll go in now and see what's to be done."

As they moved off toward the house, still hand in hand, Polly crowded roughly between them, taking the clasped hands apart and swinging herself along by them. Her mother, if she noticed it at all, read it as a sign of affection; but Dora was jarred back into her state of antagonism, not so much at Polly's rudeness, as at the mother who weakly permitted her to "grow

up like a little wild animal," and the sympathy she had just been feeling was submerged.

They walked to the house, all three in silence, Polly jouncing and scuffling, thinking up bright things to say to centre attention on herself, but afraid to say them; Dora irritated and wishing Polly would walk properly and stop dragging, but afraid to say anything lest she create a situation; her mother fluttering in thought and feeling over the will and that sealed letter her husband had written on his death-bed to Dora. At last, after months of pique and curiosity, of impatient waiting while resisting the temptation to open it by pretending to herself that it was addressed to Dora by mistake, thinking about it constantly since midwinter, the mystery would be revealed. The strange and unexpected will had sunk to insignificance beside the unknown contents of that letter.

"I'll have to get the papers out of my trunk," she explained as she turned to her room, leaving Dora standing in the small seldom-used "parlor" out of which all four bedrooms opened. "But we'll set here to read—the men keep comin' to the kitchen to get a drink or see what's goin' on."

Polly's first impulse was to follow her mother; her second, to cling to the hand still holding hers and—propitiate. An unwonted confusion was jumbling her thoughts and feelings. All her precocious judgments seemed mysteriously to fall flat when applied to Dora: she couldn't guess what Dora was thinking and why she was acting as she did; for Dora was coldly ignoring her very existence at the very moment when she should, according to all Polly's past experience with family and friends, have been showering attention, smiles, and caresses upon her. But the craving for affection and approval was like a physical hunger in her, and she

pressed her cheek on her sister's hand, exclaiming: "Oh, Dody, I do wanta do what you say—I do—I do! I wanta be 'zackly like you when I grow up. Don't you love me no more?"

Thus recalled, Dora came back to the present. She had been staring through the open door at the meadow and the slow "ka-tink, ka-tink, ka-tink" of the cow-bell, whose meaningless insistence had seemed so mournful in the night, had set her sadly thinking of her father's death—the father she had not seen since she was a child almost as small as the one beside her. Through this film of feeling she looked into the little upturned face, so eager and so wistful, loving, yet timid, with a sort of awe as of one in the presence of the inscrutable—a strange, appealing mixture of emotions at the moment—and answered with warmth, though vaguely, "Dear child!"

It wasn't what Polly had expected, but for that very reason it rather more than served the purpose of her desire. "Oh, Dody!" she gasped, kissing the hand she held and squeezing it against her till it hurt. "Oh, Dody, I love you!" She choked with emotion. A small hot ball seemed jumping in her breast. A second wonder-moment had come to her: love had a new meaning. But Dora merely wondered at the child's uncurbed impetuosity—unreserve in matters of emotion didn't seem quite "the thing" to her even in a little girl.

Mrs. Feruseth came back flushed from stooping over her trunk, a little trembly and nervous now that she had the papers actually in her hands. Would the news shock Dora? Mrs. Feruseth feared so and hesitated. Up to that moment she hadn't cared how Dora felt—she had been too shocked herself at the way things were left; but her new-sprung sympathies had both

shifted her attitude and illumined her understanding—she wanted Dora with her, wanted her “to take things right,” as she expressed it to herself. So she hesitated, not knowing how to begin; did begin: “You know it was your father’s wish you shouldn’t be told till you come home, Dody—he said nothing must be let to interfere with your studies till you got your diploma. I was bound to abide by his wishes—you won’t blame me for that,” and she broke off, feeling in the bosom of her dress for a handkerchief which she couldn’t find.

“Yes, I knew. But I couldn’t help wondering——”

“I don’t wonder you wondered! And you well might!” Her mother sat down, fingering the thick envelopes and motioned Dora to take the only other chair—a stiff-backed, wooden-seated one—not piled with garments of one sort or another. Polly, after a timid, hesitant glance at her sister in which she read no invitation, sidled over to her mother’s knee and hitched herself up on it.

“Not now, Polly.” Her mother gave her a gentle push. “I got to have my hands free for these papers.”

“I ain’t hurtin’ the papers,” returned Polly, pushing herself back. “’Sides, I can tell y’ if y’ gottum all there.”

“I know what I got.” Her mother’s tone was sharper than usual and she repeated the push. “Run out and play now, I want to talk business with Dody.”

“Well, she’s my sister—I wanta hear what she says.”

“Run out and play with your dolls as mamma tells you.”

Mrs. Feruseth attempted to set Polly down, but she, throwing herself back against her mother’s shoulder, grasped her arm and held on, protesting: “No! I d’wanta play with my dolls—ole dolls! I wanta set in your lap ’n’ hear.”

"Do as mamma tells you!"

"I tell *you*—I wanta hear what you say."

Her mother was too anxious to get at the business in hand, now she had started, to be much annoyed, and merely disengaging Polly's hand, she set her down with a gentle: "Now be a good girl—run out and play with your dollies—or your cats—and mamma'll give you a piece of cake when she's through," and she shifted one envelope over another, trying to decide which to mention first, the will or the letter. But with an ugly face at her, Polly slipped noiselessly behind her chair and, crumpled up in a corner, peered out defiantly.

Mrs. Feruseth decided for the will, as opening a natural route to the letter.

"The will's so queer—you'll wonder more when you see what he done about the property." She slowly unfolded the document. "I don't understand it—never did; nor anybody else. It's one reason why Eric's away—he didn't know how you'd take it or what you'd do."

Dora regarded her mother and Polly and finally remarked in cold exasperation: "Mother, Polly has not obeyed you—she is behind your chair."

Her mother flushed with mortification, not because Polly had flouted her commands—she was too accustomed to that—but because she had "shamed her" before this austere young person in spotless white, and with one of her rare bursts of temper, she swung her chair around screaming: "Polly! If you don't mind me instantly, I'll take the strap to you till you can't stand up! How dare you disobey me? How dare you, I say?"

Polly had scrambled to her feet as her mother turned and was at the door ready to jump, either straight into

her mother's arms with a kiss, or away. Her mother's face decided the question—it was blazing by that time.

"I think you're mean—you're mean, both of you!" cried Polly with a sob. "Mean—mean—mean as you can be!" She dashed out, slamming doors in her wake and bellowing at the top of her voice until she reached her playhouse whence the sounds, "Oooo-hooo! Oooo-hooo!" in rising and falling cadence, came through the walls.

"Stop that noise!" shouted her mother, getting up and pounding on the wall with her knuckles. "You hear me, Polly? Stop it instantly, I say, or I'll come out to you."

The bellowing ceased, but wails went on in subdued, pathetic tones. Mrs. Feruseth listened and a worried look came into her face. Her temper was over, then more than over—maternal love had flowed back in a tide of remorse. Already her heart had begun to yearn to give forth comfort.

"She'd oughtn't to cry that way—it always makes her sick. I'll be up with her half the night after this."

There was reproach as well as remorse in her tone as she looked at Dora and said: "You mustn't be so hard on a little girl because she wants to stay and hear what you say the first day you're home after all these years, and she so in love with you she can't hardly take her eyes off you. What harm could it do anyway?—she's heard the will read." She had quite forgotten that this "punishment" was for disobedience; all she saw was that Dora had "driven the child out" when her mother was perfectly willing she should stay quietly in a corner; for if Dora hadn't said anything, Polly wouldn't have run out sobbing.

"But mother—" Dora began and stopped. Again the word "weakness" struck its note, only louder;

and this time she felt as if something gave way in her, let her down, down. It was, had she known it, the beginning of the hopelessness that was to weave in and out its drab strand through all her relations with her mother, her first conscious appreciation of what was a pattern episode in her mother's mental life. The girl had a deep inner craving for integrity, for honesty of thinking and reasoning, and accustomed for years to the clash of young minds in argument and debate, carried out till one side was the acknowledged victor, the other vanquished by logic, this vacillation of thought and purpose and rule by feeling left her not only nauseated but helpless. She simply couldn't meet it on its own grounds—there was nothing in her soul to respond to it except contempt. After all, vacillation is more intolerable to live in the house with than either amiable sin or devilish righteousness.

"Polly's so nervous," her mother went on, still in the attitude of listening to the plaintive yoops that Polly was keeping up with some difficulty as anybody but a mother could have perceived from their timbre. "You're not, and you don't take that into account with her. She oughtn't to be allowed to excite herself this way. It's the Wyoming wind makes children so—they all are, those that are born and live here. It's awful on the girls and women, and boys, too, but they don't seem to mind it so much—they don't notice the way we do when it howls and roars in the night."

The "Wyoming wind" is the State excuse for bad temper and lack of self-control. Dora, who had been trained by her father to instant and cheerful obedience, wind or no wind, failed to see the force of the argument for the case presented, but telling herself: "I must have tact. If mother can't see things as they are, why . . . I must have tact till she does," managed to hold her

peace. Polly paused a moment to reconnoitre, and not seeing what she had expected—her mother flying round the corner with open arms to soothe and caress—filled her little lungs and started at the higher key—"hysterics imminent"—that always brought her mother to terms.

Mrs. Feruseth took a few steps away from the wall and in the direction of the door. "Perhaps—I better—bring her back in?" She hesitated to come out flatly and put it distinctly as a question, hoping Dora would take the hint about nervousness and wind, and repeat the words, "Perhaps you had better." But Dora did not—she was informing herself: "Such *weakness* I never saw in my life!" Her mother, seeing the expected words were not forthcoming, repeated them herself in a firmer tone, omitting the perhaps, "I better bring her back in," adding by way of excuse as she went to the door: "She knows what's in the will—it ain't as if she didn't."

Dora rose. "Just a moment, mother." It was so like a command that her mother stepped back to the middle of the room. "Is there anything about me in the will?"

"Anything about you? Why, it's all about you—it's just you and nothing else. That's what makes it so queer—what we can't any of us understand. That's what I wanted to talk over with you quietly—if Polly hadn't got so upset being sent out when she knew and wanted to hear."

"And are you seriously expecting me to discuss my affairs before a child?"

Blinking at the light now full in her face from the window, Mrs. Feruseth searched her daughter's face in the shadow, trying to see the answer to the riddle propounded. She discussed all her own affairs before and

with Polly as if Polly had been a sister; why should a sister object to a sister's hearing what she already knew? She could only hark back to the one intelligible idea she had and repeat as her argument: "But she knew all about the will, so what harm could it do you, her hearing it read again? She's heard Eric and me and the rest of us discussing it all winter—she wanted to hear what you thought about it the same as the rest of us do. That's natural. And she loving you so, she can't understand why she should be sent out when she knew it all before you did. It's only hurt her feelings—for nothing! She's crying now because she thinks you don't love her—breaking her little heart. . . ." Several extra loud yoops both suggested and corroborated this last which had been a happy afterthought in the argument and, her mother felt, a clincher.

But Dora took it coldly, and said, though with such suavity as she could muster: "I'm sorry, mother, but I'd rather not discuss my affairs before any child. If you wish Polly to come in here now, give me the will, and I'll take it out and read it and tell you and her what I think when I've made up my mind what I do think and wish to say about it."

Mrs. Feruseth distinctly gasped, "What!" for in this unexpected move she saw that Dora 'had' her, and she had no intention of being 'had' and brushed aside so neatly. With the shrewdness of long experience in dealing with her family, by reading and working their feelings to suit her ends—innocent and petty ends to be sure, but always arrived at by emotion and not reason—she knew it was necessary to her scheme of things now to witness the first gust of astonishment in order to trim her sails to the gale that seemed likely to follow. A few wails more or less from Polly were a small matter in comparison with the contingency pre-

sented by Dora, and the mother's sharp ear easily detected what her tongue had tacitly denied—the determined effort and calliope tones of naughty anger. She clutched the fat envelopes more tightly and sat down, murmuring half under her breath: "What queer ideas they do put into girls' heads at college! Your own sister, and acting 'most as if she was a total stranger. A child with so few pleasures——"

Dora had sat down, folding her hands and gazing at them abstractedly. Silence fell. Both women were perturbed. Each was trying not to let the other know it for fear of giving some unforeseen advantage; each was anxiously guessing what the other had in store for her. For some moments the only sound—one that Dora was beginning to hate—was the meaningless flat "ka-tink, ka-tink" of the cow-bell, and the rustling of papers in her mother's hands. Mrs. Feruseth fidgeted with the various documents, opening deeds and murmuring: "No, that ain't it," though she knew perfectly well it wasn't, never having let the will out of her fingers. Besides feeling snubbed and resentful, she felt lost without Polly; without the moral support of one who always blindly agreed with her against the third party, and had a tongue ready to bridge just such silences as had fallen, and she finally let off some of her feelings in a petulant "Why don't you say something?—not set there as if you had no interest in the way your father left things."

"I have, but I don't know what to say."

Dora looked up and their eyes met. Her mother read the naïve appeal of helpless inexperience and instantly softened. After all, this was her child, too.

"It's how I feel myself—I don't know what to say, where to begin—there's so much you don't know, and he didn't want you to know till you got your diploma

and came home to live. That was the last thing he said before he went to the hospital for the operation—if he was to die. . . . But I had no more idea he was going to die! They told him it wasn't the least serious—only a rupture—he'd be all right in no time. I took the doctor's word for it, and let him go in town just as he was in his common clothes—he might have had his best on just as well as not. Afterward, they said at the hospital he'd made up his mind to die and had everything ready. He knew he couldn't stand the shock of the chloroform. He was one of those . . . the thought of taking anything and being unconscious seems the same as dying to some, and they do die. I believe he frightened himself to death if the truth was known—the operation wasn't anything to kill a strong man like him."

She sighed; then flung the news like a bombshell: "Dora, he left you Polly's and Eric's *gardeen!*—left you sole executor of the will—left everything he owned under your orders!"

Dora's only reply was a stiffening of the back and a widening of the eyes. She was astonished as to the fact, but at the moment its import in her life passed quite over her head, and she asked coolly: "But why did he leave it to *me?*"

Her mother was disappointed—she had expected an exclamation at least, and probably a string of excited questions such as had already poured from everybody else, and cried: "Why did he? That's what we've all been askin' since the day the will come home—why did he?—and not one word to one of us about it! I don't wonder you're shocked—so shocked you don't know what to say. I was."

She made this suggestion with considerable art: if the girl were not shocked naturally, she must be shocked

artificially. The thought that she was taking her father's "vagaries" as a matter of course filled her mother with something like dismay: there was simply no arguing with such a person, she wasn't human. Her mother hastened on: "Why, I never was so shocked in all the world! And Eric—it was such a shock to him he's not been the same boy since. That's why he didn't meet you down to Rock River and bring you up—he couldn't face the fellas there; they've done nothing but taunt him with it all winter—call you his 'petticoat papa,' and tell him how now he'll have to clean his teeth and say his prayers before he goes to bed."

The slur made Dora wince and protest, "I don't think it's fair—when I never even knew!"

"Well, you know how boys are," retorted her mother.

Dora knew nothing at all about boys and protested again, "I don't think it's fair—to condemn me without even seeing me. And my own brother—that he should be—influenced—by such—nonsense——"

Her mother caught her up. "Influenced! Of course a boy is influenced! It's driven him so he don't know where he's at. This having a girl his own age put over him till he's twenty-one—though it's really twenty-five the way your father left things fixed, for you can't divide the property till then even if you should want to, though you have sole charge of it. Why, according as how things are worded in the will, he can't *marry* without you give your consent! That is, he can if he wants to, but he gets nothing."

"But why weren't you left his guardian?" questioned Dora sharply. Her mother's hint about being shocked was beginning to take effect.

"Yes, why wasn't I left the guardeen of my own children that I bore and nursed?" A deep flush overspread her mother's face; all the feelings of the last few

months were rising to the surface, and she suddenly blazed out: "What he did was nothing short of an insult—a public *insult!*"

"Oh, he never meant anything like that!" Dora broke in.

"Meant! Did he tell you what he meant? Write you?"

"No. He told me nothing——"

"Nor none of the rest of us. He *did* it—just went off, and did it without a word of explanation before or after. I don't pretend to know what he meant by it, or anybody else—the neighbors say it's the queerest thing they ever heard in all the world to do to the wife that was faithful to him, never so much as looked at another man for near on to quarter of a century, an insult to the woman that bore him six children in pain and suffering. And an insult to my son! Eric's the rightful man of the place now his father's gone, and his father ought of reckonized it by leaving him in charge instead of puttin' disgrace on him by settin' a girl over him, so you can't blame him for feelin' and actin' like he's been doin'—runnin' with Addie Rohmer and that bunch of fellas that hangs round Alec Moore's horse-camp. Why, your father wasn't hardly laid in the grave before she set after Eric—wrote him how sorry she was and for him to come and see her. That was before the will was sent out, and she thought, of course, he was the man of the place. Since then, she's been playin' fast and loose with him—playin' him against Posey Burnham till she finds what you'll do. Eric don't see it, but it's plain enough to me and he's on tenterhooks about what you'll do, and what she'll do—he thinks it all depends on you. He don't love her—he only thinks he does because he thinks she loves him; but God! his mother knows she don't love him! He'll

get over her the way a boy always does with his first, when she's that kind, if he's left alone, not driven to take her part by what he thinks is injustice to her from the rest of us, you in particular. He's afraid you'll put on airs against her because you been to college, and she ain't hardly been to school—though that's nothing against her out here. But if you was to oppose her, he'd run off and marry her, boy as he is, and then go to the bad straight and fast as horse could carry him."

She paused; then seeming to feel the ice of scepticism and disapproval in the atmosphere, she added in a contradicting tone: "I *know* what he'd do! I know him and you don't, and I know how the young fellas out here that marries the Addie kind goes to pieces inside the year—I've seen too many of 'em not to know. You assert your authority as his guardeen, and say he shan't marry her—you drive him into it with opposition—and you'll be responsible for his ruin."

Dora started. She had just told herself: "If I'm his guardian I certainly shall oppose his marriage to that sort of a person!" and her mother seemed actually to read the unspoken words. It was an experience that was to come to them frequently as they went on together—imponderable elements, sudden enlightenments, hidden thoughts thrusting upward and changing the current, winding them both in subtle entanglements of the spirit. For a moment they gazed at each other in veiled defiance as if each said: "Oh, I can see!—I can see what you really mean!" But it was Dora who beat retreat.

"May I see the will now?" she asked, evading all the just-raised issues at a stroke.

Her mother's lids narrowed. She was primed and ready for a eulogy on her man-child, for she by that time clearly perceived that he needed a great deal of

explaining—and explaining away—to make him “go down” with his sister; and also that there were breakers ahead it were well, at the present moment, to avoid; so she contented herself with a mild “You mustn’t blame the poor boy for feeling like he does—he’s so sensitive; most sensitive of all my children, and always was. He inherits it from his mother. You’ve got to handle him very carefully if you want to get on with him and make him like you—got to be gentle and affectionate and fall in with his plans, not oppose and criticise every little thing he does. And you can’t preach at him—he’s too independent to stand for it from anybody, not even his father—if you do, you’ll only see him fly off the handle with ’most anything that comes into his head.”

Quite unaware of the picture of egotism and feeble character she had inadvertently painted of her darling, a pleasing sense of satisfaction spread over her as she thrust the will into Dora’s hands, saying: “Read it. Then you’ll know. Read it out loud.”

The document was clear; to the point; heir-proof. Her father had provided for every contingency. It stated first his intention: a family community of kindred souls built up and organized on the plans laid out in his unpublished book; a blood-and-soil-bound community in which his children and grandchildren should live and work together for the common good. “To this end I have given my beloved daughter Dora a superior education to prepare her for the duties of administrator of my estate and director of its destinies.” He left his beloved wife the homestead and an income of two thousand a year for life, provided she accepted the terms of the will and renounced her legal claim; he gave the guardianship of his minor children to Dora. But “in view of the frailties of human nature and the

uncertainties of earthly life and its best-laid plans," he he left to Dora's judgment, or that of the trustees, a division of the property among the heirs when Eric should have reached the age of twenty-five, "in order to give my son time to come to discretion, reform his present ways, and prove himself by a marriage suitable to his station, and by his efforts during the interval in acquiring and building up a property of his own, worthy to share in the property I have acquired by the sweat of my brow." For Eric to marry until then without his guardian's approval was tantamount to a disinheritance. In the event of Dora's death, three trustees were named to carry out the provisions of the will.

"There!" cried her mother, as Dora looked up from her reading, "can you *imagine*—can you even guess what he was driving at to leave a will like that? I'd like to think he'd lost his mind—if he'd written it when he went down to Laramie for the operation when he was feeling so I could understand 'most anything. But it wasn't—look at the date—two years ago!—when he was sane as ever he was, the lawyer says, and he says it's no use us trying to bring *that* up if we want to break it. But can you imagine——"

"No, I can't." Dora's voice was almost inaudible and she had gone white to the lips. The responsibility—her own unfitness; and the time!—six years of her life bound over to this obligation, this life, before she might divide the property! A prisoner to duty!—a prisoner in a little whitewashed cell with a cracked looking-glass. In her mind's eye she suddenly saw the image of herself in that glass as she had seen it when she dressed—a self cut in two and stuck together, the pieces not fitting. It seemed symbolical: her whole life had been literally cut in two at a stroke.

Her mother, disappointed for the moment that Dora's

"shock" was not more voluble, found sweeter solace an instant later in the thought: "She's too dumfounded to speak—same as the rest of us!"—a condition that gave her a subtle advantage she had not counted on: Now was the time to spring the sealed letter! She thrust it into the girl's hand—"Read that!" But even as she did so, another idea gripped her—Polly's silence—and she went white.

"I wonder what's happened to Polly!" She listened a moment, then lifted her voice in a screech, "Polly!" There was no answer—Polly was fast asleep. The silence was like a knife in her mother's heart. She was out of her chair with another "Pol-lee!" and not listening for an answer, exclaimed: "Suppose she's run off on the range and a coyote's got her! My God!" and she rushed out of the room.

CHAPTER V

LIKE most very reserved natures, Dora took in meanings slowly at first, because she shrank from questions as a situation was unfolded to her; but later, the meanings all seemed to burst on her at once, spreading in every direction, sweeping with a rush, like a stream that has burst its dam; sweeping away, now, everything she had hoped and dreamed for her future. In those first moments of dismay, that was all she could think of—what she was losing; she saw nothing of the vista opening ahead—life in a new world, a free world; a world “partly wild and partly tame,” shaking its rough weathers in her face, its vivacious sunlight flooding wide horizons, its perfumes, its subtle significances, and daring her to tame more of it to her own uses; but out of what her own lost world meant to her she cried: “I can’t meet this—I don’t know how!” clinching her hands. As she did so, a crackle of paper reminded her of the letter her mother had thrust at her when she left the room.

Dora broke the seals and carefully removed the pages;—a thick little volume in pencil, exhaling a faint odor of antiseptics as it reached the air; the hospital smell it had carried like a sacred admonition within itself to her—the admonition of suffering bravely borne to youth shirking duty. “Poor father—what iron nerve he had,” she thought. “To take the chloroform, feeling he would never wake again!” “Iron nerve”—the will to accomplish in face of everything, even death—that was the centre of the picture her imagination

was about to paint of the man whose child she was, not only in flesh, but in character and spirit; the father who was to reveal her to herself through revealing himself to her. The first flash of the revelation came to her from the writing itself, so different from his precise, old-fashioned penmanship. The words rambled on and off the lines, becoming almost illegible in places, telling her sympathetic eye of the bodily anguish he must have endured to transmit this message to her before he went to the final test. Tears sprang to her eyes as she read, "Dear Daughter:" She had to blink them away before she could go on.

"My will tells you something of the community scheme I have planned out, but not all. You will find my views set forth in a book I have spent years in writing. It is in my desk. Your mother has the key. The book is not finished, for I had hoped that your college education would help me to some information on the relation of the Age of Chivalry to large landed estates, and also on some other matters I was waiting to discuss with you. Side issues. The main issue for the people is, Land First; after that, Homes. The land is now got together, an immense estate; and horses, cattle, sheep. But much remains to be done, more than one generation can do.

"Perhaps my idea of a family community is not possible of realization under the wavering conditions of American democracy where men follow every ignis fatuus leading to material wealth and neglect the hidden wealth of man's own spirit. The land has become to them, not a possession, a noble birthright to be sacredly guarded and developed into a worthy dwelling for a large-hearted people, but a camping-ground to loot, a temporary lodging for the night of their indifference and ignorance. They forget it was the land—a wild land calling for conquest—that made the noble

virtues of the Scottish chiefs, whose blood, with that of the vikings, flows in your veins and mine.

"Such land I found in Wyoming—a man's country wild and free, but calling for his utmost endeavors to subdue it. Here I settled and began my conquest, alone, unaided. Then I met and married your mother. A good woman, none better. A kind and faithful wife according to her lights. More can be said of no one.

"But, my daughter, though the books you have studied in college do not tell you so, and the professors have not discovered it yet, there are moral as well as ethnological races; spiritual races; races of souls of the same type and breed. You and I are of the same soul race; your mother and I are not. I loved her—never was there any other woman in my life. But love is not all. It is only one part of human experience at best. Especially for the pioneer is love not all. It is not love that subdues the land he would rule over and dwell upon, but the work of his hands and brain. And he must have a mate to his duties, his purposes, his ideals for himself and his family, not merely a companion for his hours of relaxation. In the test of the wilderness your mother failed. She has not its spirit, nor the hard stuff that carves life to its purposes, only love and indulgence for her children. Beyond love she had nothing to give them. Love and kindness that are really cruelty because they cannot look ahead for the child and see that the good of the future lies not in gratifying the pleasure of the moment. But I could never make her understand, never make her see that the great purpose of life is the will to do, ideals to make real.

"You alone were the child of my soul race, all the others were the children of hers, true offspring of the Papist stock she comes from. I saved you from her influence that you might have an education and develop

the determined, dauntless soul I saw in your eyes, when, a tiny child of four, you stood at my knee and told me, 'Papa, I will go with you and hunt that big bear—I'm not afraid of him or anything!'

"It was a travail and battle of years against her, and in the end to save you from her I had to send you, my only human companion, the one child that loved me, away from me. Only my own soul knows what it cost to part with you just when your bright, fearless eyes were beginning to see the world, life, and its destinies as I see them.

"The other children I could not save. Your mother refused to part with them. At the same time she resented all my efforts to train them in probity of action, strength of character, right thinking, and thus counteract the evils of her blind love and foolish indulgence. She called me stern, cold, severe, loveless, tactless; redoubled her foolish indulgence and secretly set my children against me. Thus, through her weakness and her inability to understand a father's duty, she made my life-work, so far as my own home is concerned, a failure.

"The bitterness of that failure to me none but you will ever know or understand. And here is the task for which I have prepared you through all these long, weary years of separation—to *succeed where I have failed*—because as a woman, a daughter, a sister, with your refinement, cultivated mind, interesting personality, you can enter into the life of the home in a way that I as man and father could not.

"Make of your brother a *man* whom all may respect and of your sister a *woman*, not a self-indulgent butterfly, a puppet to her every whim. Your success with them will prove that I have not lived utterly in vain.

"To your young hands I now leave the completion

of my earthly hopes and my life's great work for humanity. Always through the years while I have watched over you and waited alone I have told myself: 'Thus I prepare an instrument that will not fail.' With each report from your teachers of your progress I have seen myself one step forward toward the goal. I carried your letters always with me. They were my only companions, soul-pictures of my little girl so far away, on whom all my earthly hopes were centred.

"So at last comes the time when I can tell you the secret of my inner life, and to none in all the world but you.

"Weeks and months alone out on the ranges with the sheep and no voice sounding but that from within the soul, one thinks many, many thoughts, new thoughts, strange thoughts, and the inner vision is opened to the meanings of the world and life. Thus I came to know my own soul, but I lost God on the ranges, lost his voice speaking, lost his presence. Over those vast empty plains broods only the vacancy of Nature. No answering presence hears or heeds the cry of distress. A thousand sheep bleat through the blizzard. Who shelters them from its ice-filled blast? To-morrow they are dead. Nature is forever pitiless and through all her forces.

"Often when pondering these things I have asked, What is there for man himself more than for the beasts of the field? Why not live as they, gratifying our appetites, enjoying through our senses?

"And I answer, because there is something within man that is never satisfied to live as the beasts of the field—something always urging him onward and upward, stirring him to seek what is noble and right. So of all animals man alone endeavors to master Nature, to better the cruel conditions she lays down for the beasts of the field, making his life as he would have it, not as she would compel. Man alone has ideals and

aspires to attain them. And this because man alone has a *soul*.

"But in order that his soul may expand and thrive within him, man needs companionship of his own soul race. Soul hunger is real. Soul starvation kills as surely as bodily starvation, though more slowly—facts not admitted by your learned professors of the colleges because they cannot put souls under their microscopes, or weigh them, healthy or starving, in their balances, but that my experiences out here have proved to me beyond argument. I have proved it living surrounded by aliens in race, belief, thought, ideals, aims—an alien world always seeking to drag me and mine to its petty, degrading level. Of my own soul race I know but one—my little daughter two thousand miles away.

"Always alone throughout my whole life except for God, and I lost God on the plains. But this great lesson the plains have taught me: even if Nature is eternally pitiless, even if there is no heaven, and no God to answer our prayers, we still have our own souls within us, faith in the ideal still remains to us, and our will to strive for nobility of character, and to accomplish something that shall help humanity and leave the world better for our having lived. Faith in the ideal—the will to attain our purpose in spite of obstacles—these never forsake us unless we forsake them.

"I leave you . . . "

The sentence remained unfinished. Below it, hastily scrawled as if at that moment the nurse—and Death—had summoned him, was the single word, "Father."

Dora looked up from it awed. It was more than a voice from the grave, or even the call of blood to blood that echoed through her soul; it was the call of race to race—the call of the strong, the creative, the self-sustained who had met life undaunted at obstacles, un-

flinching at suffering. She thrilled—she was his child, and he had chosen her—prepared her—trusted her to carry on his life for him; and with it, she felt a quick compassion for that struggling soul, always alone, yet still cleaving to its ideals even after it had “lost God on the plains.” A new vision had taken possession of the scantily furnished chambers of her heart—a figure of grave mien and noble aspect.

She was recalled to the present by hearing her mother’s voice outside speaking to one of the men, and with it a veil seemed to lift that had covered her parents’ lives. Races apart, worlds apart, those lives had flowed side by side in two distinct currents, touching only at their edges. Neither had ever understood the other. What suffering it had meant to her mother, Dora did not stop to think—those insights only came to her later; her sympathies were now all with her father and his efforts to make headway against a cushiony love without moral resilience. But sharp and clear that unfinished sentence—“I leave you . . .” rose beckoning to her imagination. What had he left—what final secret—what special obligation? It was characteristic of her own idealism and cloistral unworldliness that it never occurred to her he was about to convey material gifts to her. The will had attended to that; this referred to something deeper—a something in especial to cherish most tenderly of all. Could it have been her mother, or Polly, the baby of the family? Or was it some invincible ideal to be ceaselessly striven for? Dora was turning back the pages in hopes of a clew when she heard her mother’s steps coming out of the kitchen, Polly’s clattering along beside.

Mrs. Feruseth, having discovered Polly safe but frightened to tears by the way she had been suddenly

awakened, hearing her name shrieked at her through the side of the house, and just over her ear, had decided while soothing one child it might be wiser to leave the other alone for a while, give her a chance to read her letter and collect her thoughts—a decision easily come to, because Mrs. Feruseth needed a chance to collect her own thoughts. Silent people had always rather frightened her, and after the revelation of what her husband's silence had brooded and hatched, she had come to feel she must keep her wits about her in dealing with such natures, and take nothing for granted. Her wits at the moment were at rather loose ends; so as an excuse for staying away while she straightened them out, she pared a pan of potatoes for dinner, and thus calmed and morally supported by Polly's presence at her side, Mrs. Feruseth threw open the sitting-room door and blithely demanded: "Well, what does he say in the letter?"

Dora was struck so dumb with the question shot into the very heart of her father's secret that her mother felt constrained to add: "Or haven't you read it yet?" though she saw the pages open in Dora's hand.

"Yes, I have read it." Dora spoke with icy finality, at the same time thrusting the clumsy sheets back into their envelope.

"Well, but what did he say?"

Dora protested. "Why, mother, this was a letter to *me*! You saw the envelope was marked 'Private.' " She hoped her mother would take this hint, since she hadn't the other.

Mrs. Feruseth's expression changed; the red of anger crept into her cheeks as she demanded: "Does that mean you ain't going to tell me what's in it—after all these months waiting to find out?"

"How can I?—a private letter intended only for me!"

"If it's something so bad you can't tell it——"

"It's not bad at all!" interjected Dora hotly; to which her mother retorted no less hotly: "Well, I know it's something about me or you'd tell me quick enough—something he was ashamed to say to my face while he lived! Always so secretive—so 'fraid anybody would find out anything about his affairs and his plans and schemes—I guess I lived with him enough years to know his character!"

The girl was too candid to duck and dodge while leading her mother off the track, yet she denied the imputation for her father's sake, though she felt some truth in it. "You're totally wrong! There isn't a word in it that my father could have been ashamed to say to your face—not a word! But that letter was to *me*—it was private and about things he wanted me to do for him. If he'd wanted you to know—or do them—he'd have written to you instead of me."

"I don't know that he didn't. It ain't addressed in his handwriting—some nurse or doctor down there to Laramie could easy have mistaken 'Miss' for 'Mrs.' when he said it, so you got it when it was intended to be sent to me. I thought of that forty times—Eric said it was my duty to open it; but I didn't." Her tone was now both self-laudatory and aggrieved. "I said, 'No—I may be wrong,' and I saved it for you, never supposing you'd go and act up like this—keep secret from your own mother a letter written by my own husband, never!"

For answer, Dora thrust the letter into the bosom of her shirt-waist and rose in silence, her indignant retort checked by this new view of her mother's moral sense, and thinking: "Hasn't she common honor? How can she stand there before an impressionable child and

ask me to betray the secrets of the dead who cannot defend himself against any interpretation she may choose to put on his words? And hasn't she even common decency in dealing with me?" In that moment, she felt her respect for her mother frosted like a vine on a trellis.

Her mother seized the moment of silence for a desperate shot: "Does that mean—I want a plain yes or no—that you ain't going to show me my husband's letter at all? Ain't even going to tell me what's in it?"

"I have no right either to show you or tell you."

"You got a right to do what you please now you got it in your possession. What's to hinder you, I'd like to know?"

"My own conscience."

The reply was so unexpected—a word so long lost to Mrs. Feruseth's vocabulary and never active at best—that she seemed to fall under the spell of the same revulsion she had so often felt in her husband's unbending attitudes and moral righteousness. Everything unyielding gave her a sense of inward impact; every demand on her for a fixed attitude turned her natural indolence into a deadly lassitude that was almost nausea. "She's James all over!" she thought, and the suddenly awakened echoes of her husband's influence impelled her to submit and withdraw as of old; but immediately came the words: "She's my *daughter*! I have some rights in this house—my children are bound to show me respect and consideration! She shan't treat me as if I was nobody—right before Polly!" Stiffened by this new idea, she said in what was meant for a commanding tone: "I wish to see that letter, or know what is in it. I insist upon it."

Through Dora also there had flashed the thought of

Polly—Polly, wide-eyed and gaping, excited and a little frightened, shrinking at her mother's side: *she* must respect that mother no matter what.

Ordinarily, Mrs. Feruseth would have taken her warning from set lips and blazing eyes, but she was too uplifted by the idea of the "disrespect and setting down" she was getting from one of her offspring in the presence of another to notice signs. The red of her quick temper now burned on her cheeks. She took a step nearer, holding out her hand. "I want that letter. Give it here immediately."

Dora reached the most heroic moment of her life had she but known it. The accumulating disgust of everything there, the moral repulsion, and the indignation at this treachery to her father—this brave, sincere man, always misunderstood and alone, to whom her inmost sympathies went out—all joined in urging her to denounce sin and sinner, let her mother see then and there how far she might dare the daughter of that father to swerve from principle and conscience; and into this fury wove a small sharp thought: "I must succeed where he failed—for his dear sake."

"I cannot," was all she said.

Her mother felt the impact; and they stood there eying each other, Dora without a thought of yielding, but her mother measuring the forces of attack. She had the impulse to fling herself bodily on Dora, calling Polly to help, and tear the letter away: Dora was her own child—a naughty child who must be made to mind. But she feared something that she sensed in the atmosphere—a cold, implacable determination. Retreat alone remained, and that wasn't easy.

"Come Polly—after such an *insult* as this—" She turned the child about and pushed her toward the door which had shut as they entered.

Polly, by no means ready to retreat, questioned innocently: "Won't she give you the letter?"

"No, she won't. I've been insulted in my own house. Here, let us get out of this room." She pushed the child a few steps forward, but Polly hung back and piped up at her, "Well I'll ast her, then—she'll give it to me—she'll tell me—if she won't you."

That was the last straw to her mother's defeat and mortification. "To you, indeed!" she cried furiously. "And you disobeying me, too! Get out of this room instantly!" She fumbled at the knob, trying to pull the door open with one hand while she was pushing Polly against it with the other, who suddenly ducked out of her mother's clutch, screaming: "Oh—outch! You hurt me!" The door flew open. "Out of this room, I say!" Her mother's voice rose shrill; and still more shrill and furious as she flung over her shoulder at Dora: "The mistake I made was in trusting you to do what's right by me; but because you were my child, I thought you'd have—*common decency*! Eric was right—I'd ought of read that letter before you come home."

CHAPTER VI

SHOCK is the witness the soul bears to its ideals; suffering the measure of its aspiration. Those who aspire to nothing, neither feel the sword-stroke upon an ideal, nor mourn the failure of its attainment. Mrs. Feruseth had no ideals—at least no fixed standards for which she consciously strove. Her maternal love, that eyes more enlightened to the world's hardness and self-interest than Dora's would have seen as "ideal," she considered "only natural"; it was too much the very fabric of her soul to be observed, formulated, striven for. It simply flowed spontaneously forth. No obstacle could long check it, not even such an "insult" as she fancied herself to have received from both her children. Her temper gave place to the thought that all was by no means ended in the letter business, for it wasn't possible that a daughter living in the same house could long maintain silence, utter and abysmal, on anything so bulky as that letter: it was bound to melt and run out if only by accident. "I should have shown more tact with her," said her mother, by which she meant that she should have watched for a soft mood and wheedled it. But she put even these thoughts hastily from her when she looked at the clock which told her she had only a bare half-hour to get dinner in—that endlessly recurring task that must be completed on the stroke of noon for the men who would come stampeding in at five minutes of the hour to wash and "slick up" at the sink and watch every minute ticked off after "twelve" had sounded.

Dora, left alone, found no relief to her feelings either in anger or tears; nor could she find the smallest consolation in religion, of which, in its now generally accepted terms she had practically none; in its purely theological sense, none at all. As a very small child, her mother had made a brief attempt to teach her the catechism and a few fundamental Roman Catholic doctrines—Dora could still remember a faded picture pinned on the log wall representing the Virgin with a flaming heart in her breast that the child had thought a weird impossibility—a course at first denounced, then flatly forbidden by her freethinking father. “Of religions there are many, and they are all boasting the one revealed truth and divine sanction, and all cutting each other’s throats to prove God’s love,” said he. “Of moral law there is but one for the whole of humanity: thou shalt not steal *anything* that is thy neighbor’s—his possessions, his thoughts, his reputation, his feelings, his ideals. My child is to be reared in that law. As for theology, she is to be left free to choose for herself when she has arrived at years of discretion and knows how to choose.” And he had made Dora learn that law by heart. Her mother had attempted no argument, not even that of prejudice and predilection. Living seventy miles from a church of any sort—a four days’ journey across the plains there and back—she had simply had to give up going, and her daily life, the wilderness, her children with their incessant demands and vivid realities had dimmed both her sense of unseen presences and the value of churchly sanctions. When the family had moved from the cabin in the hills to this ranch, she had forgotten to unpack the few religious relics she still retained; had forgotten even where she had laid away in newspaper these last remnants of a devout girlhood.

Dora herself had entered church for the first time when she went East to "prep" school, and she had been more astonished than awed. It was an Episcopal service, and the twelve-year-old girl, fresh from the wilds and eagerly comparing new impressions with old, kept asking herself: "But why does the minister do that? And why do we do this?—keep falling on our knees and then popping up again! Does God care to see folks behaving like that? I wouldn't—if I were God. What good would it do me?"

After puzzling over these questions for some time, she found courage to put them to her favorite teacher, Miss Glynn, a Unitarian of the Boston High Brahmin type who had in secret often felt much the same herself, and who found the problem of dealing adequately with this awakening soul taxing and absorbing, and from it had sprung a deep interest in the Wyoming girl, and on Dora's part a love and admiration that had ended by her spending her summers as paying guest in the Glynn's home in New England. But for all that, Dora had never quite yielded her heart to Unitarianism. Some lurking strain kept her yearning for the personal friend in God and drew her toward Evangelism. And yet—she intensely disliked its theology. "This rounding up of hell-scared souls and corraling them in heaven on the hoof—it seems to me a blasphemous intrusion on the angels," said she. She wanted to go straight to Jesus and tell him her troubles and say as to a friend: "Jesus, you understand all this better than anybody in the world—please help me and tell me what I ought to do," but she never quite could bring herself to it: some barrier seemed always to rise between her soul and his: she asked help, but she never felt him answer. At moments in the college chapel, when the girls' voices rose together in familiar hymns—words and music that

brought no echoes from her own childhood as they did for others there—or as the organ throbbed through and through her, the barrier seemed almost pierced, the veil over her spiritual vision lifting. But the moments always passed without fulfilment: there was no immanent Presence on whom to call for a personal answer. The one God was Nature, producing in pain, only to destroy with raging blizzard and blood-steeped fang and claw. How well she knew what her father had meant in his letter!

From such ideas, vaguely formulated, but experienced as barriers, rebuffs, hopelessness of answer, she had always fallen back on the security of the moral code, yielding herself willingly to its exactions, sometimes with an exaltation of idealism, sometimes with a sad "It's the one thing you're certain of," and thinking, "He that is faithful to that which is least—" Through *that* faithfulness might the vision come at last!

Such had been her religious history—a groping amidst intellectual perplexities, a longing for direct communion with an Unseen Presence, a sense of failure in both directions—and now, as she stood there in a whirlpool of emotion, she found nothing to clutch at to support and guide her course except inner ideals, and these were smitten as if with spear and sword. "That my mother could! That *my mother—could!*" she kept repeating, actually tragic. She had been keyed up to it, of course, by everything that had gone before, and not least by the thought that she must find herself and everything and every one connected with her father "worthy" of the man as she pictured him; and her mother—wasn't! *He* never would have made such demands and insinuations—*he* would have respected another's secret! The girl was too inexperienced, too self-contained to be able to put herself in her mother's

place, and thus realize that the desire to see her husband's letter was not in the least unnatural, a request to be expected of anybody without taking it so frightfully seriously and as if the heavens were about to fall; and she was too overwhelmed by the raw facts to perceive how this secret she had so curtly refused to betray would now gnaw and gnaw between them like a living thing.

Out in the kitchen her mother hurried and scurried, and in a lull, when all the vegetables were on and boiling, expatiated to Polly on the duty every girl owed her mother—the wrongness of keeping secrets you had no right to keep, which was being deceitful and almost as bad as lying; and she wound up with a sigh: "Dear Lord, is it to be another James all over again, but this time *in petticoats!*" The distinction she felt had a humorous touch that would have been quite lost on Dora; for her mother was one of that vast class of women to whom the mere fact of sex divides moral judgments into two kinds and gives the tolerant ones to man. "It would of been bad enough if it had been Eric actin' up like that to his mamma, but to take such treatment from one of my *girls!*—I declare I won't, and they may's well understand it first as last. There are *some* things a mother has a right to *expect.*"

This last, added especially for Polly's guidance on the path of filial duty, won instant, sympathetic response.

"Well, I never kep' a secret from you in my whole life long, mamma darlin'," she cried, throwing her arms around her mother. "*I'd* have showed you the letter!"

"I don't know whether you would or not," returned her mother bitterly. "After the way I've been treated,

I don't know what to expect from any of my children." Nevertheless, she immediately kissed her, calling her "sweetest pet—mamma's little comfort."

Dora's uppermost thought was not greatly dissimilar: after what had happened she didn't know what to expect. The morning had been a stupefying revelation of what it meant to return from college to home, mother, family, and have to live with them—a revelation of "impossibles." That, in substance, was what it all amounted to thus far—an "impossible" mother—an "impossible" little sister—an "impossible" brother in the distance—an "impossible" home and surroundings—an "impossible" responsibility—an "impossible" relationship to everybody and everything; in fact, an "impossible" situation all round to a college-bred young person with the instincts of a student and a gentlewoman, and the inexperience and attitudes of the cloistered life. She didn't know there were so many "impossibles" in the world, and here they were all collected in a bunch, of which she was the responsible manager and guardian! She felt bewildered; a good deal appalled; but stifled rather more than anything else, for it all seemed to have settled on her chest so that she couldn't breathe. She must get away somewhere by herself alone with nature and think.

She took her hat and tiptoed out, not knowing where she was going or where she could go to escape from prying eyes; but the far side of a rock ridge across the big meadow seemed to offer seclusion, and she hurriedly made for it, scrambled over and out of sight of the house. Then the view burst upon her—the plains with Laramie Peak to the east—a wonderful panorama bathed in sun and silence. Not a bird, not an insect, not even a whispering wind broke the stillness; not a

tree was visible; only in the crevices of the rocks about her clung a few stunted sage-bushes, hardly more than bundles of twigs, and below her and beyond, far as the eye could reach in every direction, the sage rippled over the flat expanses, with here and there a billow, until it all flowed over the horizon at the west—an ocean of sage on which the cloud shadows dropped slow-sailing blots, and above which the sunlit air shimmered as if alive with concealed radiance. But all life seemed to have withdrawn and hidden itself from the noontide glare.

Dora found a small ledge and sat down, folding her hands. She had meant to reread her father's letter, but did not. She felt then she didn't need to, for, lying against her heart, it seemed to distil some subtle essence that penetrated direct to her inner consciousness, and through it she knew his soul better than his words had revealed it; then saw it pictured, expressed, explained in the Peak pricking the blue with rugged purple as it rose above the plains, dominant, steadfast, alone. Indestructible rock—indestructible man-stuff! They wasted away without change of substance, granite to the end of time! And about them forever the plains, there since the world was young, an immemorial austerity, bare-bosomed to the sun and storms, asking nothing, offering nothing, like an eternal meditation to which man, his hopes and ambitions, his joys and sorrows was but a speck of dust upon their vast expanse!

She sat there gazing, almost entranced, but from that purview she could garner nothing to help her present needs or feed her moral ideals. Right and wrong, good and bad, happiness and suffering, life and death were alike indifferent to the plains—man had no more impressed his will upon them than had the cattle wandering from spring-hole to spring-hole, grazing as they

went; but from out the unconcern of Nature herself there exhaled a large tranquillity that enfolded her soul like a soft garment. Her turmoil subsided; misunderstanding, antagonism, responsibility faded; her mind was set free from its cares and its "impossibilities," drifting away and away, now to distant horizons, now to clouds overhead, dreamily quiet and at peace; and into this revery the thought of her mother when it came was not of the mother who had rushed out panting "insult," and throwing back opprobrium, but the mother who had rushed to embrace, crying: "Oh, Dody darlin', I'm so glad—*so glad* you've come home!" Love wasn't all, but in the face of this immemorial austerity and indifference, love was a big *something*! . . . and the family . . . and dinner!

A horn was sounding and echoing—saying "din-ner, din-ner!" plain as ever it could. Dora exclaimed: "Dear me! How long have I sat here I wonder?" and immediately hurried back to the house.

Dinner was already on the table, all but a dish of potatoes in her mother's hands through the steam of which she regarded her daughter and remarked with more asperity than she felt: "So you've come back! I had Polly blow the horn, but I didn't know from the way you went off by yourself as you wanted any dinner."

Dora had been ready to "make up" shyly, but she was instantly chilled and thrown back into herself; she was humiliated, too, as she glanced at the three men, washed and extra "slicked up" in her honor, their hands on the backs of their chairs, awaiting the signal to pounce and devour. But since she had obviously had a gauntlet flung to her she picked it up and answered the challenge coldly, but meaning to state once for all a fact the assembled company might as

well know and remember: "There's no need of your ever worrying about me if I go out for a walk. I'm accustomed to go and come as it suits me, and I'm used to being alone; I simply must be alone when I have important matters to think out."

Her mother regarded her for a completely blank moment before she replied, "I can't understand how a child of mine can want to be alone for a minute in this wilderness so far from folks," and put the dish in front of her plate, saying: "Dinner's ready—set up, all!" However, she was smiling softly to herself as she turned to the sink to wash her hands. Hers was a heart without rancor; even a just resentment died in a kiss or a few fond words from her children, and this time, resentment perished at a thought—"What a beauty Dody is, and how elegant she dresses! Polly'll be just like her, only sweeter-tempered, when she grows up—and I'll see to it that *she's* not spoiled by college."

CHAPTER VII

AN intolerable meal, Dora's first with the "family," during which the three ranch-hands gorged, and swilled tea, quarts of it, amidst painful efforts at company manners, which resulted in a painful silence nobody but Polly had the courage to break. She, distressed at the lack of attention she was accustomed to, tried to capture it by recounting a yarn of how the wolves hamstrung her pet colt an' it bled to death while they was chawin' it alive, only to be curtly reminded by her mother that such subjects weren't fit for the dinner-table.

"I don't see why they ain't," grumbled Polly. "It's true—fer I seen him when he was dead with his tongue hangin' outa his mouth, an' Eric told me the wolves chawed him——"

"That will do," snapped her mother, and Polly subsided, but fastened her stare on Dora, wondering what she had to do with why things were all at once so queer that you couldn't talk about chawed-up colts. Dora stared at her plate, and the rest took their cue from her and stared at their plates. Neil Mathers, a hulking, bovine creature of small intelligence but enormous muscles, uttered not a syllable. When he wanted bread he spiked it with his fork; when he wanted potatoes, he reached out his plate and waited with down-cast eyes till Mrs. Feruseth put them on, his dull mind alive to but one thought: "I wonder if *she's* lookin' at me now!" Olaf Sodergreens, a big, uneducated Swede, one of a large tribe "down Jelm way," offspring of a

single couple who had settled there in pioneer days, sat at the end of the table opposite Dora and helped the fried ham, taking pains to see that Dora got the choicest section—a slab large enough for a laboring man. Olaf had been the mainstay of the ranch since her father's death—its virtual manager—and he was thinking of that, and telling himself he would like to see any girl boss *him*, now you betcher! "Her father warn't no better'n mine when he started—pioneer like the rest o' them old-timers—so what call's *she* got to put on airs, if that's what she's doin'?" I'm the one knows how to run a ranch, an' that's what takes a *man*, as she'll find out, now you betcher!" The more he tried to feel at ease, the more ill at ease he felt, and for once in his life looked to Freddie Woodhull to help him out—Freckled Freddie-bird, the despised remittance man, who was commonly reported to have left his country for his country's good, or if not quite for so important a reason, Freddie hardly warranting that, at least for his family's peace of mind, and to better his sister's chances of "marrying a decent sort of chap," by which his family meant an "Honorable" something-or-other; which wasn't likely to happen with Freddie perpetually in evidence as a sample of the fruit of the family-tree. He was undersized and homely, light-haired, light-eyed, his almost colorless lashes making his face look weaker than it was, and he was sophisticated to an inordinate degree. When his quarterly remittance arrived he rode down to Rock River and drank and gambled as long as he had a cent; then he returned to his job, cleaned out, sick from the vile whiskey, wobbly on his legs, unwashed and unabashed. So every few minutes he would look at her slyly, only to drop his eyes and ask himself: "I wonder what she's think'n' of me, though." But she wasn't thinking of

him at all—she had dismissed him at her first glance, labelled, “The most unprepossessing of the lot.” What she was thinking was how under the heavens she was going to put up with eating at the same table with these boors, and adding another item to her “impossibles.”

It didn't occur to her that they were finding her as much to “put up with” as she found them. Meals in that house might be horridly served and hoggishly gobbled, but they were plentiful and pleasant. Until now! “Y'd think they'd been a funeral in the front room!” was Olaf's inner comment while wiping up his plate with a hunk of bread and swallowing the tasty morsel in a gulp. Then he reached for a toothpick, pushed back his chair and tilted it against the wall, and went to work at his mouth with loud sucking noises that expressed satisfaction and physical well-being after a good meal. When the meal was not to his liking, he showed it by chewing the pick instead of making noises. He did a little of both now, the chewing representing his moments of deep cogitation on his next move in the game to find out where he stood in managerial capacity—and where everybody else stood with reference to the new boss, their standing for or against being a necessary part of his stand, the determinant as to whether he would pull his ropes to stand in with her or stand out against her, “an' it all depends,” he ruminated. “She ain't no mossback—she's one o' these here ice-backs, an' y' can't never tell what they got up their sleeve.” So he tilted and chewed, waiting for Neil and Freddie to go out, which they hastened to do, then brought forth, with a loud sigh: “Well—good dinner! Work to be done fer all that.” Smiling at Mrs. Feruseth and dropping the fore legs of his chair on the floor to prove himself ready for business, he con-

tinued to address her, without precisely ignoring Dora on whom he was keeping one eye. "What about brand-in' them calves?—y' said y'd tell me what's to be done. We gottum all rounded up this mornin' an' they're up to the corral—some fine ones, too—musta been born right early in the season somewheres where the feed was good. But two of 'em that's still suckin' their mothers has been mavericked on us!—the brands is fresh—not more'n three days old. I bet I know who done it, an' all I wisht is I'd caught him with the iron hot in his hand—I know where that brand woulda landed, now you betcher!"

Mrs. Feruseth's only comment was an interested but vague "Well!" and Olaf hurried on, now with both eyes on Dora, who sat listening intently. "Say, it's a new one on us! That there brand belongs to a fella up to Medicine Bow, an' them calves was on our own land not hardly outa sight o' the house! Y' can't tell me them little young calves come down from Medicine Bow in no two-three days! They was branded not two hundred yards from where they stood. . . . Oh, y' gotta be onta *some tricks* fer to run a ranch an' not have it stole from under yer feet." He fired this direct at Dora, and though she answered only with a slight movement toward him, he felt her receptive, perhaps even ready to take sides with him, instead of he with her! Why not? He was the *man* on the place—Neil the Ox and Freckled Freddie-bird he didn't count in that category—so he went on explaining to her. "But this here's a new one in this part the country. I heard the fellas tell about it up to the store, but it's the first time I seen it—on our cattle, anyways. Y' see how they do it is this: A fella in one place, why he exchanges a brand with a fella in another part the State an' each of 'em mavericks so an' so many fer the other, according to what they

agree on; it saves his brand bein' saw too frequent in one county—folks is liable ter git suspicious. Say you's livin' here, an' me livin' up to Medicine Bow, why you borry my brand an' steal ten critters fer me, an' I borry your brand an' steal ten fer you, but each one of us, why we sell what we stole fer ourselves, pretendin', of course, when we go to ship 'em, that we're doin' it as a favor an' mean to turn in the money, you to me, er me to you. See? Well, I'm ont a 'em now—got the proof that some fella's workin' it here right on our own ranch; an' thez jes' one party this side o' Medicine Bow's got the gall to work it on *us*, an' that's Posey Burnham, an' nobody but Posey Burnham, now you betcher."

Mrs. Feruseth flew to the rescue. "I can't believe that of Posey—I'd have to see it!" but thinking, "I wonder if Eric's someway mixed up in this? If Posey done it, Eric'll be the one to bear the blame like he always has."

Olaf ignored the denial; his attention was too much occupied with Dora, whose eyes had opened wider and wider at this new revelation of the life she was called to live; but with this, she felt the call to responsibility and action, and she was ready for both. Steal their cattle, indeed! Well, we'll see about that! Her mother glancing at her was startled—"James to the very life on the day we married!" she thought; though it was the moral atmosphere rather than the physical appearance that had struck the responsive chord: that tense but silent *something* in the depths of their being, like a tight-wound spring in the midst of its works that would keep the clock ticking and striking the hour indefinitely. Olaf, too, noticed the resemblance, and in that instant it began to seem natural to look to her for orders, though his instinctive self-interest made him continue to treat

her mother as if she were still in authority—it was just as well to have her on his side if he so easily could; and it was to her he now turned, cautiously sounding out her position, and whether she found it natural to look to the same source for orders.

“I thought y’d want the brandin’ done right off so’s not to waste feed—we’re liable ter run short this winter—so I told the boys fer to git the fire ready an’ the brandin’-irons het up—” He paused to give her the chance to assert her authority if she chose to, or to abdicate then and there, and thus settle at a stroke who was giving the orders.

But she wasn’t prepared to do either so easily: a child of hers that she had borne in pain and sorrow mustn’t be allowed to think she could stay away from home ten years and then walk in and rule and regulate everything the first day! Her mother shrewdly saw the horns of the dilemma as Olaf presented them—and also suspected that he had done it on purpose to make her spike herself on one, and dodged both by rising from the table, drawing Polly up with her, and saying: “We’ll go up to the corrals and look at them. . . . You’ll come, Dody?” She hesitated a little as she asked it—if Dora refused . . .

Dora accepted with alacrity. She had no intention of making matters worse than they were, and above all of letting common ranch-hands know there had been anything like a family quarrel going on. She hadn’t the ghost of a suspicion that her mother had long since confided the matter of the will and the letter to those same common ranch-hands who had been all winter discussing the general situation, and had already let them know enough of the morning’s episode to leave them disappointed, if not actually aggrieved, for they had come in expecting no less than to hear the letter read aloud, or

at least in substance delivered—a choice morsel of latest news to peddle about at other ranches, where the account of an ear-witness was always at a premium. Indeed, the idea of galloping off with it that very afternoon had been one of the motives prompting Olaf to order the other men to get ready for the branding immediately after dinner. He, however, was the only one who took Dora's concealment of the letter personally, and he had told her mother on the spot: "I don't see what right she has to hang on to a letter that may concern everybody on the ranch. He likely put something fer me in it—Bessie's Colt that he promised fer to leave me in his will, an' didn't. Mebbe he fergot at the time he made the will, but he'd of remembered later an' said something 'fore he died—he warn't one to go back on a promise, now you betcher! You know that. An' if he did leave me Bessie's Colt in the letter, why . . . I wanta know it soon's possible." He had started to say, "Why—she could keep it herself by keepin' her mouth shut," but his shrewdness saved those words in time—he had learned by much experience not to pass moral criticisms on Mrs. Feruseth's children in her hearing. Bessie's Colt was the one object in life he loved; he had broken it and taught it tricks, one being to answer yes and no by taps with its forefeet. Seeing this one day, in an amiable and expansive mood, James Feruseth had humorously admitted: "He seems to understand you—perhaps because you're brothers under your skins. So I guess I'll have to leave him to you in my will." That was all the "promise" amounted to, and it was made a year after the will—a fact that Olaf had discovered from the date on the will and was at pains to conceal, hoping nobody on the ranch had the wit to remember that the horse was only a two-year-old and not broken at the time of the conversation he so circumstantially described.

Such was the man walking beside Dora to the corrals had she been able to read him: ruled by self-interest and full of petty schemes for playing off one person against another to serve his purposes; always a little disgruntled over injustices, mostly trumped up by his own imagination; bitterly jealous of those who had more than he; resentful toward any one who "set himself up," or could be considered "better" than himself socially; and yet not without some sterling qualities of character and genuine warm-hearted attachment for Mrs. Feruseth, whom he waited on hand and foot, bringing in wood and water without being reminded to, and looking after her interests and the ranch management with almost the devotion of a son, and much more interest and responsibility than her own showed;—for which, of course, she made allowances, and thus continued to manage Eric. She managed Olaf by the simple process of not managing him at all and keeping him filled up with immense quantities of savory, substantial food. Hardly a day passed but she made some dish he especially liked, and his vanity told him she had made it just for him. Being a "valuable man," he took it as his due; but it touched him. He had seen enough of ranch life to know that there were few women who would take the trouble to "do for company" what she was doing all the time for her family, day in, day out, as a matter of course.

Thus things might have drifted along on the ranch for years if James Feruseth hadn't perpetrated the unheard-of: left everything in charge of a slip of a girl who knew nothing about anything but books. And here she was! Olaf watched her furtively and talked across her head in order to do it; but beyond allowing that she was the prettiest girl he had ever seen, he simply couldn't make her out. So he babbled on, wondering

and watching; it was a shame to waste all that feed on them cows that could be pickin' fer theirselves well as not—keep 'em up another day waitin' fer Eric meant feedin' 'em real hay—hay liable to be awful short, owin' to the drooth this spring——

Mrs. Feruseth answered vaguely in each pause. "That's so," without thinking or caring what he was saying. After a few of these replies, he decided: "Well, she don't know where she's at. I'll give her a chanct fer to find out—who *is* givin' orders now," on which he propounded: "*I* think them calves had ought to be branded an' run on the range right off, but Eric, he left positive orders to wait till he come home—an' he ain't home, an' ain't likely to be this time o' day. Yet he knowed fer certain we'd be finished roundin' 'em up the day Dora come home. But if you say to go ahead an' brand 'em—" He stopped, his face one big question-mark: now she would have to say, or refuse to say, and turn the reins of government over to the new governor. It was really a dramatic moment to him. He pretended to be utterly indifferent.

Dora's first name falling in that casual way from the lips of the hired man gave her shock; but she was too inexperienced in dealing with "such liberties," as she thought it, to know on the spur of the moment what to do, and could only compress her lips and stare ahead wondering "what next" she would have to put up with, and determined to show the fellow his place before he took much more on himself; and thus in silence they all three reached the corrals, Polly racing on ahead to climb the gate and shout advance information of the passing show. And in that silence her mother abdicated for herself and her son. She had seen her opportunity and what it might mean in maintaining Eric's position and how it might later be woven into almost anything. She

had tried to say in a commanding tone: "If Eric left orders to wait till he got home, *you must wait*—that's all I've got to say about it." Then see if Dora would stand right up and contravene *that*! With a quick glance her mother reconnoitred, and discovered a fixed stare, a stern eye, and a frown—for what, she couldn't guess; but a guilty conscience needs no accuser, and she took the whole expression as disapproval of herself. Her courage flattened out, withered by some intangible reminder of her husband in the girl beside her. The words were never said that would, by acknowledging Eric's authority in a trivial matter and afterward supporting it in larger things, have changed their whole relationship, and their lives together; and all because the hired man had spoken of her daughter as Dora before her face! Polly just then yelled: "Now, Dody, y'll see some fun! Hurry up!" and Dora was glad of the excuse to climb the lower bar beside her and look over.

The calves, mostly small—later arrivals born after the first regular branding—wild-eyed, unhappy-looking, and restless, were clinging close to their mothers' sides and watching the fire in the centre of the corral where the branding-irons were heating, Freddie and Neil fanning it to a glow with their hats. The cows watched both the fire and their calves, and every few seconds one or another gave a snort and pushed herself and her calf nearer the fence. Dread seemed to run like a ripple round and round the enclosure, a visible shudder, communicated from animal to animal.

"Are all those ours?" exclaimed Dora; forty-four animals seemed a great many to her;—and a great many to own and look after, and see that they weren't mavericked.

"All those!" mocked Polly in fine scorn. "Why, these here's nothin' to what we got out on the range!

Y'd ort of saw the bunch they rounded up fer the first brandin'!—every one o' these here corrals packed so full y' couldn't fall between 'em! Eric, why, he jumped in onta one cow's back an' run clear all way 'crost on their backs to the other side—that's how *thick* they was packed! Sardines! One little calf got squashed to death."

"But who takes care of them—milks them all?"

Polly hooted. "'Milks 'em!' They don't milk 'em—they kill 'em—these here cows. They don't milk only the bossy cows—Star an' Cherry Blossom an' mamma's little Jersey; nobody milks any but bossy cows—didn't you know *that*? Why, Dody! Whadda they learn y' in the college where you was at?"

"Nothing about ranching, that's certain! So you'll have to teach me. You see I've got everything to learn—even that you don't milk some kinds of cows!"

"Oh, I will—I'm tryin' to, Dody; an' you'll learn awful easy oncet you go to it, you're so awful—smart—'n' so awful pretty—'n' *good!*" She bent down and kissed Dora's hand holding the top of the gate. Dody wasn't tryin' to rule an' regulate everything, so there! Polly stowed this thought in a handy place in her mind to use on her mother as a lasso at their next private séance, and kissed the hand again, watching to see if her mother noticed. Polly was now all on Dora's side—she had to be to feel right; but she had to be on her mother's side to feel happy. For a moment Polly's little loyal heart was chopped in two; then the bright idea came to her to rope her mother and pull her in.

As for Olaf, when he saw how admittedly green the girl was, he grinned and turned away to hide it, squeezing through the gate and shutting it with much show of care. The others had fumbled their chance at giving orders—here was his: he would go ahead without orders

and see what happened. He pulled a branding-iron from the fire, tested it by spitting on it, then shouted across the fire: "All ready! Go to it, fellas—let her sizzle—make a time record."

The corral was too small and crowded for any feats of roping. The men simply seized a calf, threw a noose around its neck, dragged it head and tail from its mother to Olaf and flung it on the ground by him; he brought the iron down on its flank—three seconds, and man had set the mark of his possession forever upon the flesh of a sentient being, to own it, use it, sell, or kill it as suited his purposes. The calves scrambled up and ran whimpering for their mothers, kicking out at the stinging pain, butting blindly into anything ahead until they found their refuge. The cows snorted more and more wildly as they smelled the burnt hair and flesh, rolling their eyes till the whites showed; pressing closer and closer against the fence; trying to climb it and escape the unknown fate that hemmed and pursued them. The men dashed in and out among them, snatching, pulling, whacking about, shouting down resistance, beating the cows in the face with their hats to turn them from the calves they were defending. Not a moment of pause—the men were playing to a metropolitan audience. When Olaf shouted: "All done!" he was immensely proud of himself.

Dora watched the performance in wide-eyed, shuddery fascination, but her mother had scarcely been able to stay through it. She hated brandings; hated the sight of suffering, particularly in young creatures, and the distressed lowings of the cows when their offspring were torn from their sides seemed to her the pleading call for help of motherhood to motherhood; she read human anguish in their rolling eyes, and murmured: "Poor bossy—poor old boss'—you'll get your baby in

a minute!" to the cows that pressed up to the gate. The smell of burnt hair and scorched flesh that presently filled the air made her sick—coming on top of her morning's excitement, the whole scene was more than she could stand. She was white as a sheet as she turned away, saying: "I must go back to the house," and Dora seeing it, went with her; but all the way she was thinking of Olaf and her name on his lips and inwardly fuming and fluttering to know what to do about it. She couldn't let it pass—she knew that—but she had never taken a man down in her life. But, she was certain of one thing—whatever else her father's will had let her in for, she wasn't going to let herself be called "Dora" by her hired man! She turned at the door, and went back and did the deed forthwith.

Neil and Freddie were already out of hearing, driving the cattle back to the range; Olaf was still in the corral, stamping out the coals and feeling disgruntled because his audience had walked off without bestowing the commendation he thought was one of his perquisites; but as he saw Dora coming straight to him, obviously to speak to him alone, a silly grin overspread his face. This was even better—he had certainly made some impression on her—and my! but she was pretty! He met her at the gate, still sheepishly grinning and ogling her and got her words full in the face.

"Olaf, I think it would be better for you to speak of me as you do to me—as 'Miss Feruseth.' I am the head of the house."

She smiled to soften it, turned on her heel and walked off without a hint in her manner that she cared a rap what his reply, his excuses, or his feelings might be.

For some seconds he was too dashed to move; then he ejaculated: "What the hell!" and spat out the quid of gum he chewed after meals for his digestion. He

knew he had not spoken to her by any name, and he had forgotten that he had spoken of her as Dora in her hearing; but after a moment of confusion, he told himself he saw what she was driving at—"Puttin' on *airs* from the word go—showin' she means to make everybody stand round an' do what *she* says—I'm the boss on this here ranch—I'm *Miss Feruseth!*" Huh! She's a chip off the old block all right—expects to git what she wants by a mere say-so like her father always did. . . . Eric, me young rowdy buck, here's where you got it in fer y'—you'll git what's comin' to you, er I miss a guess."

Not for worlds would Olaf have admitted it, but her "*airs*," as she walked away, lithe, erect, purposeful, very white and starchy and remote, enormously enhanced her value in his eyes—exactly the same feeling he had had when Bessie's Colt won the blue ribbon at the State Fair: it compelled recognition of superior merits—ability, effort, fine stock-breeding, money—in the ranch he belonged to. That ranch had bred Bessie's Colt and—"Miss Feruseth." "*She's* a blue-ribbon winner, now you betcher!" he acknowledged with considerable pride. "Ain't no other ranch this part the country ever produced a filly like her, now you betcher! When our young bronco-buster gits home an' starts in breakin' *her!* Gee—they'll be *some doin's* on the old ranch then, now you betcher!"

Dora, though quite unconscious of the effect she had produced, was inwardly fluttering at her own audacity; still, she felt better all over as one does when a straight-up-and-down proposition presents itself and is successfully put through, and took a deep breath, repeating to herself as apology for an episode unique in her life—"I *am* the head of this house now and I must be treated as such by everybody." And in this small episode with

its call for defined action and attitude, all her indecisions of the morning had, without further reasonings or agonies, suddenly found their vital answer: "I am the head of the house." In those few words to Olaf she had declared and accepted her relationship to her new life; had strapped the "white man's burden" of responsibility upon her young shoulders. Come what might, she was there, not to "make the best of things," shilly-shallying along the way her mother did, but to rule, to build, to create—to make *new things*—for her father's sake, in his stead and as his representative.

Dora awoke in the middle of the night, asking: "What was that? Where am I?" The events of the day, the opening of new worlds of duty, thought, feeling, action for which nothing in her previous life had prepared her, had ended by leaving her too numb for anything but sodden, dreamless sleep, across which there had fluttered a mysterious call. Wide-eyed and puzzled, she sat up in bed, trying to see something familiar, still asking: "Where am I? What place is this?" After a dazed minute she remembered, got up and went to the window, peering through the netting at the dim-lit, silent meadows about the house.

How unearthly strange everything looked!—that was what she had been called to see. The Night Spirit had whispered to her: "Come, O mortal! Come see the plains by moonlight and you will understand what you only glimpsed by day—the riddle of the universe."

She dressed and tiptoed out of doors. Picking her way gingerly, she crossed the meadow and clambered up the rocks to the place where she had sat in the morning. What a world now spread around her! A pallid world painted by a pallid moon from out a pallid sky, light without lustre, shadowless and insubstantial—a

silver enchantment as far as the eye could reach, upon which the air lay motionless, dreaming its own silence. For a moment a cricket hung himself to nothing by a silk-thread song, but he clipped the thread almost as soon as she had pinned her faith to him and said: "There's something alive at least!" Then she was the only thing alive in all that world. . . . Fancy being in a world where you're the only thing alive—where there's not a sound, not a word, not a sign, not a motion, not a breath but what you make yourself! Such was the world that met her eye, and even as she gazed at the dim outline of the Peak, it seemed to recede from her to a measureless distance, and the surrounding plains to stretch limitlessly away to meet the sky; and while she tried to follow these recessions and pierce the distances, she seemed to be reaching out and out of herself as if to touch something, and finding in every direction only a blank. Except for the ground beneath her feet which she was scarcely conscious of, there was nothing—no tree nor bush, no tangible object—between her and the farthest horizons and the deeps of the sky above her head. Looking up into those deeps, she thought how the earth was spinning on its axis and at the same time flying with breathless speed around the sun, and the sun, carrying all its satellites along, was flying silently on and on, no man knew whence or whither, just flying forever, uncharted, on its secret errand amidst the stars. Think of the elbow-room it had in space! Since the dawn of creation it had been rushing through space and had never hit anything, and it could probably keep on throughout eternity! The awful vastness of the universe! The awful emptiness that left runway for whole constellations! The void! And the void was filled with—nothing!—eternal nothingness through which the sun and stars wended their eternal way. The sense of the

void and of the eternal nothingness took away her will; looking into the depths of the void she presently became so dizzy she felt she must lay hold of something rooted and solid to keep herself from falling off into space and being lost in it forever. It was a dreadful feeling for a minute—a feeling of being lost in the immensity of the universe, of sailing forever through uncharted space to hidden destinations, and of being part and parcel of secrets one could never know. It didn't seem fair! . . . But was anything in the whole of nature *fair*? She remembered her father's letter—he had found nothing "fair" in Nature, nothing loving, nothing even kind—that was the secret he had tried on his death-bed to reveal to her understanding, her soul: man, and man alone had created his ideals of kindness, fairness, justice, right, out of his inner fabric and in spite of Nature; and she recalled Goethe's lines:

"Ever Nature is unfeeling,
She lighteth the sun for evil and good,
And o'er the destroyer shine as o'er the blest,
The moon and stars."

Unfeeling Nature—bullying, invisible void filled with eternal nothingness! In the midst of this man had to take his chances along with the animals, get what he could, go without what he desired, as best he might; only, man was immersed in a sea of *secrets*, of anguished questionings of mind and soul never answered, while animals browsed contented on, all things a matter of course with them. Plains and sky, day and night, sunrise and sunset, the stars in their trackless flights across the universe—it was all a mere panorama to the beasts of the field, without puzzles or purpose, without meaning, without insights or inspirations. To man alone had Nature whispered her magic word: "I have a secret!"

and in that precise instant he had stopped being all animal and had begun to be—human. That made the difference, when all was said and done. Man alone asked: “Whence—whither—why? What does it all *mean* that here surrounds me?”

What did all this mean that now surrounded her, sketched in pallid moonlight? She saw herself in the midst of a phantom world, devoid of quality; a world neither pitiful nor pitiless; with nothing left either to desire or deny, nothing to placate, propitiate, or appeal to; a world in which nothing lived, nor yet was anything dead—a world of silver enchantment, limitless, empty, immobile, unmeaning, uncaring, unanswering: the world of the void without ghosts or God.

Then as if the Night Spirit whispered again, she seemed to hear: “Behold now!—this is the enchantment you have come home to conquer—this is the meaning of the task your father set you—to conquer the spell of the plains by night. All who have lived here have fallen under our spell; none may resist it who have ceased to be animal and begun to be human. No will to achieve but has fallen under the seduction of the eternal calm of eternal nothingness, beginning and end of all things. Behold now spread around you the transition stage between the anguished questionings, yearnings, and strivings of little man, and the eternal nothingness—the world where nothing matters!—nothing you do, or how it is done; nothing you know or do not know; nothing you have or go without; nothing you love or lose; nothing you suffer or enjoy. Under this spell, all things become alike—good and bad, right and wrong, justice and injustice, beauty and ugliness, duty and shirking, obligation and irresponsibility, bestial gratification and noble aspiration—nothing matters, because nothing is *real*! All is a dream that will vanish

in the eternal nothingness filling all space between the stars."

She felt the spell creeping over her, into her very fibres, and filling the place where once her will had been, a vaporous sense of the unreality of everything without and within, the unreality of her thoughts, her life, her very self; and across this unreality carrying her away to eternal nothingness there flashed the meaning of her father's words: "I lost God on the plains." This was what he had seen and known out with his sheep alone on the ranges—the presenceless void, the world where nothing mattered; this was the silver enchantment that had taken the conscious possession of God from his soul; this was the insidious enemy he fought through the lone nights with only the senseless bleating of his sheep to answer his anguished questionings and his cry: "O God, where art thou?" And the battle of his soul had been against a whole world—family, community, nature, and enchanted nights where nothing mattered—nothing but naked life and consciousness and ideals. To wrest those from this!—to live against all the array of blind, pitiless forces ever seeking to overwhelm and destroy; to be conscious against a meaningless void; to be self-conscious against a sea of phantoms, knowing self as self, living and conscious of its aspirations in spite of everything—*that* was the secret of secrets, that was the eternal miracle hid in the bosom of eternal nothingness before which all other acts of man, and all the blind, pitiless, mighty and unconscious forces of nature and the universe sank to insignificance! That miracle of self-consciousness, alive in its own ideals, had been the secret and the victory of her father's life! It came to her like a revelation, like a message from the dead, a mystic word from a soul attained to one striving amidst shadows, struggling upward to-

ward the light; and she threw off the spell of the world where nothing matters, crying aloud: "Life is real! *I* am real! I am—I know I am!" flinging it like a defiance at the magic of the night. "Things *do* matter!—good and bad things matter—and whether they're well done or slacked—conscientious work matters—it matters to the world! Duty, obligation, responsibility, ideals matter—they mattered to my father—they matter to *me*!" She didn't wait, however, to argue it with the void—she had had her fill of it and its lonesomeness—and hurried rather precipitately to the house, wishing she were little enough to jump into bed with her mother and cuddle up in her warm arms like Polly and not feel ashamed for doing it.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE are hours of revelation that leave their impress upon the whole of life; acquiescences and revolts welling suddenly out of the depths of our being, that accomplish in a single moment more than months of reasoning over pros and cons, ifs and buts. Such a revelation—climax, to be sure, of a day of emotional distress and mental awakening—had come to Dora from the silver enchantment of the ranges by moonlight: the revelation of a world where nothing mattered because nothing was real; where all effort was futile and all ideals a dream; and her revolt against this lethal magic spread into active revolt against almost everything in her surroundings. Youth at her age is at once the most pitiful and pitiless period of our lives. With painful endeavor and much anguish of spirit it has put off childhood's abbreviated garments and clad itself in white starched aspiration; but it has spun no wool of wisdom for a cloak in which to nestle against the chill ironies of the world. Life touches it to the quick, but if joy warms it the more easily, it must yet shiver through untoward events as best it may. Dora was pitying her father; pitying the woman who had shared his life and never understood him, and was left to grieve; yet she was pitilessly protesting against the makeshift, the slipshod confusion and lack of nicety, the indifference, the irresponsibility of her mother; the general vulgarity of all the home surroundings. "People could be comfortable and decent if they only tried hard enough

to," she inwardly declared. Her college education, her orderliness and refinement, her intellectual appreciations and moral attitudes—these were *real* and worth striving for, and by the token of her protest against a world where nothing mattered, she now felt herself called to make her values real to those about her. The call was loud. She was fired with a zeal for "betterment," and wanted to start right in the next day uplifting the whole community. She must prove that she lived in a world where *everything* mattered—she would *make* it matter!—show what could be done on *any* ranch with effort, determination, high ideals! But when she thought of Olaf Sodergreens and Neil Mathers and asked herself "just how" she was going to uplift them, something like a stone settled on her chest: they didn't seem quite the subjects for uplift; at least, not to begin on. She didn't even think of uplifting Freddie Woodhull, there was something about him that repelled her so—his sly way of watching her at table till he had caught her eye, then giving her a faint smile that seemed to say, "*I* know how you're feeling about all this—it's not what *we've* been accustomed to!" as if he were trying to share her concealed disgust and thus create a secret understanding with her. She resented it; resented the assumption it implied that he could be anything more to her under any circumstances whatever than a mere hired ranch-hand. She would have been filled with virginal rage could she have overheard a conversation among her hired men in the bunkhouse at the close of her first day at home.

Olaf set the ball rolling. In spite of his new-found admiration, he still felt the snub she had given him when she "ordered" him, as he considered it, to speak of her and to her as Miss Feruseth, "an' if she's goin' on actin' up like that—treatin' me like that—an' doin' it

in front o' folks who could hear it—" he thought it wise to set afloat reasons for his leaving, or at least an early hint that he didn't care to stay. Said he: "Well, fellas, things is gittin' awful queer on the ranch sence the old man kicked over, an' liable to be queerer from now on, unless I miss a guess. Orders an' counter-orders an' no orders at all—Eric givin' 'em like he owned the place, then stayin' away; the old woman givin' 'em like she owned the place, then don't dare fer to squeak; me givin' 'em—where they gotta be give—an' don't know but next minute I'll be called down an' told to mind my own business. Gosh, if I like it—I wanta know where I'm at! It's been bad enough fer to have the old woman always takin' the boy's part, but he don't dare interfere with me more'n jes' what he knows I'll stand fer. I'm on to him an' Posey Burnham tradin' brands with them fellas up to Medicine Bow—they don't come it over me, you betcher!—but if *everybody's* to be God-amighty perfect, what'll it be fer us fellas here? No place fer Olaf, lemme tell y'. The rest of y' may be willin' fer to put up with it, but I ain't, now you betcher!"

He lighted his pipe which he had been filling and looked from one to the other to see how they had taken him and what support he was likely to find for a strike against petticoat rule. Neil was placidly puffing and merely grunted; but Freddie, blowing a cloud of rank cigarette smoke, and watching it spread out against the low roof, murmured: "A pretty girl. A ver-ree pret-tee little girly, and she can have me—for one wink!"

Olaf, picturing her as she had walked off in the morning, broke into a loud guffaw: "I see y' gitta wink off'n that icicle, Freddie-bird! I see y' gitta *look*!"

Freddie straightened up in his chair. The idea that he was a born lady-killer had been rather strengthened

than otherwise by his Wyoming experiences, and he took Olaf's words as a challenge. "What'll y' bet?" he cried. "And what'll y' bet I get a kiss?"

"An' I betcher couldn't even *steal* one off'n that girl, not if y' stood over her with a gun!" cried Olaf. In exalting Dora's aloofness and that something he couldn't name that had quelled him, he suddenly felt he minimized his defeat at her hands. "She'd floor anybody that tried to git fresh with her, I don't care who he is. You try stealin' a kiss—" he gave a loud "Whoopee!" and flapped his feet against the legs of his chair as if he were driving cattle out of his way.

Freddie, brick-dust red, turned a pinker shade at this insulting pleasantry, but he kept his temper—Wyoming had taught him not to lose that since he periodically lost everything else; but he spoke with more energy: "I don't mean steal—I mean *get*—give, get—she gives, I get."

"An' I say again, y' couldn't git a kiss off'n that girl *even* at the point of a gun," declared Olaf, "fer she'd look down the barr'l an' tell y' to go to hell an' be damned."

Freddie went back to his drawl. "I disagree with your idea of the lady's part in the dialogue."

"Betcher! How much—one dollar, er ten? I betcher she'd see y' damned to hell twicet 'fore she'd kiss y' oncet."

"But she would not—ah—say it; thus proving my contention."

That was a bit beyond Olaf. "What would she say, then?"

"Nothing. Superbly, magnificently, statuesquely—*nothing*."

Neil broke out in his loud guffaw and roared, "You betcher!" and Olaf seeing the point agreed: "I guess

ye're right! She's one o' them girls can damn y' to hell an' never say a word."

"But she'll not damn me to hell. And I shall—get the kiss."

"The hell, y' will!" Olaf felt himself turning hot under the collar. It was something more than the primal male jealousy—it was the hatred of the outsider, the foreigner, and also a redoubtable pride in the ranch that for years he had helped to make, and in everything belonging to it. In that moment he became in some sort Dora's champion: she was as much too good for Freddie Woodhull's kissing as Bessie's Colt was too good for his riding. "I think I see her—the richest—the prettiest girl in the State—kissin' a little freckle-faced, dead-broke, ornery remittance man!"

Freddie turned a vivid pink but still kept his temper. "S-sh! Don't wake the baby!" he warned sweetly, though his eyes were flashing. "Those are not pretty epithets for a gentleman to listen to in his—ah—own home." He made a gesture to indicate the bunk-house which the three of them shared.

"Huh—you!" grunted Olaf, getting on his feet and towering above Freddie, who began nonchalantly rolling a cigarette as an excuse for not noticing Olaf's threatening looks. It was on the tip of Olaf's tongue to say: "I'll show y' whose *home* this here ranch is and how to talk about the owner," but he contented himself with another "Huh!" and stalked out into the night.

Dora, who had never kissed a man or been kissed by one even in fun, would have felt the limit of credibility reached could she have heard these three—her own hired men, albeit they went by the better-sounding title of "ranch-hands"—thus discussing her; she would have felt less indignant than sullied and put to shame

in the inward recesses of her being. But the idea that any man would harbor such thoughts, much less say them, was beyond her; still, though she had only the vaguest notion of Freddie's real character, a subtle atmosphere of furtive immodesty and concealed boldness penetrated her when he was near, filling her with a nameless aversion and contempt. No, she would not undertake to uplift him—here was one case where effort would be futile. He had had splendid opportunities, and what had he made of them?

His formality and the way he kept himself in the background wasn't all studied—he was a good deal less at ease than he wished to appear; for every time he caught Olaf's eye, that eye said in plain words: "I got something on you, y' little freckled remittance man, an' don't *you* fergit it!" In less than a week Freddie would have given his whole next remittance to be able to recall that bunk-house boast. If she knew it—For hours and hours out in the alfalfa-field his mower sang those words to him: "If she knew it? If she knew it?" The answer was: "I'd have to go." He knew too much of gentlewomen from his mother and sister to deceive himself on that point: *she* would forgive that even less than they would! Her very inexperience made her take everything so seriously. And he was glad of it!—glad she wasn't like the other ranch-girls out there. He fancied he was going to fall in love with her, but he couldn't persuade himself that he had anything much to offer a girl like Dora, except—love; sincere, devoted love that would die for her if need be, and he didn't even try to persuade himself that he had that—or could have it if he wanted to! He was just wondering about it all and waiting to see what was going to happen. Meanwhile, he must appear as well as possible in her eyes, so he shaved every day instead

of once a week and put on a necktie. But love or no, he knew he wanted her respect. A dim past he thought dead was sending forth a few belated blossoms in his soul—he genuinely wished himself a “better sort of chap,” and regretted all the opportunities he had thrown away. Thus, though she had passed him over as a not-fit subject, her uplift was already at work upon him; for, unknown to herself, she was one of those rare women who rehabilitate rather than inspire through the unconscious appeal of what they are to a better and buried past in others. He, too, was college-bred—a university man—she ought to appreciate that! He dropped a few timid remarks about his varsity crew and some of the chaps at Cambridge—and caught a pugnacious, threatening stare from Olaf’s end of the table, which Olaf put into words outside: “If y’ll take my advice, young fella, y’ll keep yer mouth shut on them things—*has-beens* don’t cut no ice in this community.”

So the two men watched each other, noting every word or deed that might be turned to future account; and Neil watched both of them, stupidly wondering why they weren’t as good friends as they had been, and why everybody, even at table, seemed to have forgotten his existence.

CHAPTER IX

THE events of the day that had probed Dora to the core, made her feel spotted in honor and rumpled in dignity, and ended by bringing out her fighting blood, had left her mother feeling all flattened out, yet on the whole fairly comfortable. "It's best for everybody that she should take all responsibility," thought she. "She's so steady—like her father." She had never felt steady since her husband's death; it was only after he had gone that she realized how much he had done for her peace and comfort by the very inflexibility she had found so trying to live with: she always knew where to find him; knew she could rely on him and his word to the death. As for Eric—she never pretended down to the depths of her secret heart really to rely on him—he did whatever came into his head, regardless; though she still pretended she "knew where to find him." "His heart is in the right place—he's never stopped loving his mother," she said, and felt she had some cause to doubt it, for at the end of Dora's first week he had not come home, nor even sent word.

"I can't imagine why Eric don't come home—he knows *she's* home!" her mother would confide to Polly a dozen times a day and look anxiously down the road. "It's no way to treat his sister—and his mother. Worry me like this!"

"Mebbe Addie Rohmer won't leave him come—she's 'fraid when he sees Dody he won't care no more fer her," suggested Polly; only to be tartly reproved, "Don't say such a thing about your own brother!

Addie Rohmer—nor any other girl—couldn't keep him away from home a week when he knows how anxious I am to see him," though she had been thinking the very words Polly uttered.

Finding this grow stale, Polly thought out a new explanation: "Mebbe him an' Posey Burnham has went off on a trip somewheres—to Laramie, er Medicine Bow—er Utah. Posey, he told me las' time he was over that he's goin' to Utah buyin' horses, an' mebbe he took Eric with him."

Mrs. Feruseth pursed her lips and said nothing—this was what she secretly feared, but the last thing she would admit even to Polly who received all her confidences. A thick, bull-headed young fellow, Posey Burnham, just Dora's age, with a growing reputation as a "bad man," in which he gloried, and a growing bunch of horses and cattle that were mentioned in the community with lifted brows and irony. The ranch-women were already whispering among themselves that "Posey was marked for murder"; adding, "And I hope and pray it ain't none o' my men-folks. We do all we can to keep the right side of him, and so long's it's only two or three calves, we don't let on we know we lost 'em."

He was the offspring of a German immigrant girl, sister of a neighboring rancher, and an Englishman—a typical "younger son" of the kind that came out to "the States" a generation ago to make a large fortune out of a small one and went home on borrowed cash—whose name Posey had appropriated without legal right. His heritage had resulted in a queer mixture—tenacity, self-reliance, cock-sureness, vindictive jealousy of every one who had more than himself, a touchy pride always looking for slurs on his birth—and the worst in both strains of blood had been developed by a plainsman's life. From boyhood he had carried on an undeviating

policy of bulldozing to get his "place in the sun," and people submitted to his aggressions and tried to keep on the right side of him because his vindictiveness knew no limits, as they had seen proved on their live stock, and he was too sly to get caught in the act. But with it all, he had that peculiar Teutonic sentimentality devoid of sympathy, and an affectionate way that passed for sympathy and friendliness—a "good side" that won him liking even among those that feared him, and a welcome on lonely ranches whenever he loped in with his pockets full of candy and presents and his mouth full of wild, improbable yarns suited to a primitive taste. Children adored him—they regarded him as cross between Santa Claus and an epic hero whose bright, valorous deeds were ringing through the world; and not less than forty little boys in knickers were secretly shaving and hanging from cross-beams in the effort to grow tall—which is "how you do it," he told them—in order to rush forth with him to Indian conquests and glory, and forty little girls in pigtails had decided to marry him, among them Polly—provided she didn't marry Eric, as she had always expected to, on which point she was beginning to have some doubts because of certain looks passing between her elders when she declared that intention aloud.

After his mother died, the year Dora went away to school, Mrs. Feruseth had taken Posey into her home as one of the family, and when her husband remonstrated, "No good comes of those born in iniquity—you're bringing the fruit of evil into your home to plant the seeds of evil," she replied with unusual spirit: "All the more reason the little fellow ought to be given a fair chance. *He* can't help what his mother did—besides, everybody stayed friends with her. Didn't she send for me on her death-bed, and ask me to be good to him

when she was gone? Didn't I tell her I'd do all a mother could? And how can I do it if I don't take him and look after him as one of my own? I couldn't rest easy a night in my bed thinking of that poor boy, not out of short pants yet, alone in the world, no home to go to, thrown in with a lot of rough men who'll let him go cold and hungry, teach him wickedness. . . . It isn't Christian, and we with plenty and room for him here!"

James said no more, silenced partly by her argument, partly by his policy of never interfering with matters of strictly home management and the guests she chose to have, even if they stayed for months; and he had done his duty as he saw it by the boy, ruling him sternly, lovelessly, though with entire justice.

But deep in her heart she had hidden her real reason—a mixture of superstition and devotion: Posey was a vicarious offering to fate for her own little girl so far away: what she did for Posey would in some mysterious way of Providence be done by some one in love and wisdom for her child. No one ever knew the inner comfort she found in caring for the boy; yet it was she herself who put him out of the home four years later, secretly getting him a job as horse-breaker, guilefully urging and advising him to "seize the chance to make a big place for himself in the world." She did it to save Eric—Eric the catspaw in every escapade, the scapegoat in every punishment.

She refused to believe Olaf's hint that Posey had rebranded two Feruseth calves—it showed a depth of meanness she wouldn't admit of one she had mothered; but far back in a dark place in her mind she knew he had done it, and she could feel his evil influence coiling back over the ranch and mesmerizing her son as it did when they were boys. Her vague anxieties of the winter,

when their long-lapsed friendship was suddenly renewed under Addie Rohmer's influence, now flooded over in Eric's absence, a nameless dread shot through with sharp disappointments and hungry longings, and she was silently living through some of the bitterest days of her life. "Why don't you come home to your mamma when you know how I've been counting on having you?" her heart continually cried out to him. "Don't you love me any more? Are you going to let Addie or Posey take you away from me in my old age just when I'm depending on you most?"

But in the midst of her distress she clung to a new-found hope—Dora. His guardian would control him—she had the legal right; his sister would save him from Addie and make a man of him!

Unconscious of what was going on in her mother's mind, wondering vaguely why Eric didn't appear, but too busy to give much thought to him, Dora was bending all her energies to the task in hand—learning the details of running a ranch. She was constantly out and about, observing, absorbing, but seldom speaking unless spoken to. To the men she soon came to seem like a white phantom, the way she suddenly appeared, watched and watched, then disappeared without a word of comment. Olaf took it as a compliment—it seemed to say she was satisfied with him and his work; but Freddie found it uncanny. She appeared thus suddenly at the end of his field one afternoon to watch him mowing, and immediately his machine stopped singing its accustomed, "What if she knew?" and changed its tune to: "She knows—she knows what you said about her! That's why she stares!" and he felt her eyes boring him till he got so nervous he thought of running on a stone to break the spell.

As a matter of fact, she would have been put to it later to say which of the men was on the mower; she was listening to its song—the hymn of man's conquest of nature—of her conquest of “the world where nothing mattered”; the conquest she had pledged herself to, the uplift she was to bring. But—she was beginning a new period of awakening. Her determination was still fixed as ever, but where was she to start? She felt herself on the outside of a closed wall, looking for a crack through which to break in and begin improvements; but what? Everything went along so perfectly without her, and she the responsible head! Olaf gave orders, mowers sang all day long, and alfalfa lay in miles of green ribbon on the ground; more orders, and it rose into the air in huge stacks; and nobody—apparently—gave orders, yet cows were milked, chickens and pigs fed, wood chopped, food cooked, and dishes washed! The only thing she had even been consulted about was—Bessie's Colt; Olaf had snatched the first opportunity to do that, carefully recounting all the circumstances that had led to the “promise”; but all he got out of her was: “My father may have left some memorandum among his papers. If he did, I'll let you know when I have time to look them over.”

“I thought mebbe he said something in that letter he wrote y' down there to the horspittle to Laramie with his last wishes——”

He felt very bold when he started, but stopped abruptly at the look she gave him. “If he had mentioned the horse, I should have told you,” she replied icily and left him gaping after her. She didn't even listen to the apology he tried to mumble.

That was all—something somebody wanted to get out of her for his own private benefit! But the work—the life—the future—her father's plans and whether or

not they could even be carried out! "I might as well be in Jericho for all the good I can do here!" she thought in bitter moments. "And it doesn't seem to occur to anybody that I'm giving up anything to stay here—that I may have a life of my own I want to live!"

Naturally it didn't. Her mother had no conception of the academic life, as an aim in itself, or that Dora had ever been intending to do anything more than enjoy her advantages while she had them, then come meekly home and hang a framed diploma in the sitting-room as a trophy, and work round the house till "Mr. Right" came and she married and lived happy ever after. As for the girl's giving up anything she really valued! Her mother would have replied: "Why, look what she's *getting* here! The whole ranch to do just about as she pleases with. What more could anybody want, I'd like to know?"

Dora didn't want anything *more*—she wanted something utterly different—her own world, her own kind; wanted it hungrily when her sense of incapacity was strongest. But in strongly idealistic temperaments, states of emotionalism produce their own anæsthesia; youth reasserts its rights in objectivity; the active mind responds to new interests and sweeps the cobwebs from the sky. Life on a ranch, no matter how slightly desirable, how lacking in vista and inspiration, has verdant patches of the endurable; and Dora waked up in the midst of one on a Sunday morning with the feeling that things weren't so bad after all!

More properly, she was awakened by a squeaking door and a whisper—"She's still asleep!"—Polly's voice.

"Well, then, let her sleep, darlin'."

"But then her breakfast will be dinner, an' she'll miss the s'prise I made fer her."

Dora called out at this: "Hello!" and in fluttered Polly with a joyous: "She's awake! Guess what time it is? Ten o'clock!"

"Ten o'clock!" Dora sat up in a hurry.

"All but five minutes," corrected Polly, always anxious to appear exact. "Two hours more, 'n it would of been dinner, an' then you'd 'a missed . . . m-m-m-m-m-m . . . you'll never guess what you'd 'a missed!"

"Then I mustn't waste a minute." She smiled up at her mother. "So trot out and let me get up and dress."

"Soon's as you git up, I'll go."

"Oh, I'll get up—I won't go to sleep again."

"But I wanta see how you look in your nightgownd—I ain't seen you that way yet."

Dora laughed. "But I'm not on exhibition in my nightgown. So please trot out and shut the door."

"Do as she asks you to, darlin'," her mother advised, seeing Polly about to tease. "But first I must have my kiss." She folded Dora in her arms, kissing her cheeks and brow; then gently pushed Polly out of the room, closing the door.

Dora sprang out of bed. What a heavenly, lovely day outside! The blue, blue sky twinkled at her it seemed so alive with light; the sun poured in at the window, and the faintly stirring breeze through the mosquito-netting was laden with the scent of drying alfalfa in the field, cut the day before. Everything called to her: "Come play—come play with us!" She was happy—she was uplifted in spirit—she was ready to pour that uplift out on anybody who might desire it—or need it. She giggled with amusement as she heard through the board partition Polly in the next room saying plaintively: "I wonder why Dody wouldn't leave me see her in her nightgownd. Why, mamma?" And her mother:

"Stand still, darlin' while I tie this bow on your hair."

"But, mamma, why do you suppose she wouldn't—she would of looked so sweet in her nightgown!"

"I don't know."

"She must of had a *reason*—she always does."

Silence.

"What was her reason, mamma?"

"I don't know—you'll have to ask her. Come now and hurry with your clean apron—I must go and cook those chicken livers I saved out of the stew for her, and beat up her fresh griddle-cakes."

"I'll call through the door an' ast her what her reason was."

"Now, don't bother her, darlin', and do stand still while mamma buttons your apron."

A door slammed. Dora still smiled, repeating to herself: "'So sweet in her nightgown!'—dear child! How much these little things mean in her life—and in everybody's life out here!" Of herself as purveyor of these small pleasures she did not think at all; for like all self-centred people with large inner resources for their own entertainment and guidance, she was exceedingly impersonal in her attitudes and asked little more from others than an interchange of ideas. She might picture herself as a source of intellectual uplift, but she was far, far too modest to picture herself as a source of joy. Still, she was pleased to find herself so, and cheered and inwardly warmed, and went on brushing her rather snarly hair in unusual haste to be out of her room. She was hungry and full of the animal spirits of healthy youth—this was the spell of the plains by day—the spell of "the world where nothing mattered" but the joy of life and wings to the spirit! To fly away over the plains on a swift, strong horse! To conquer the

far horizons! Breathe the delicious air and know there were untold miles of it, scented and singing through the sage!—singing in her ears—singing in her heart! Wyoming days!—each with its own enchantment—its own call to the soul of man to be—to do—to dare! And youth, hearing the call! . . .

She took her father's letter from under her pillow and thrust it into the bosom of her waist; she still carried it so, for it seemed to give him a little span of life more on earth, and in some mysterious way to guide her, to encourage, speaking direct to her inner consciousness—"Keep a good heart against it all—I also was alone in my ideals, but I achieved!"

Though she had nibbled at pages here and there, she had not had time to read carefully his unfinished book and master his aims and ideas; nor had she seen enough of the ranchers and their lives to realize the futility of trying to create a communal life activated by common ideals among them, and bring unity out of the "blood chaos" of the Western population; or, indeed, out of any part of the American population except for little regions in New England and the South;—a country with no peasantry, no small landed proprietors dating back over as much as two generations. For it is the peasantry, the small people living for centuries next the soil, that have kept alive the folklore and fables, the old traditions, a vast sedimentary deposit of generations of thinking and speculating on the inner meanings of things, a store of richness deep down in the subconscious life of peoples, in the soul of a nation, that secretly nourishes the great tap-roots of imagination from which spring creative art, sustained ideals, the will to achieve. Without this human reservoir, this sediment nourishing the higher faculties, self-interest grows over the land unchecked like a squash-vine—

"Every man for himself and the devil take the hindermost." She had caught glimpses of that already, but not enough to discourage her; as for her father's "Great Scheme"—it was so far in the future she gave it very little thought; there were too many other things to get hold of first. With winged feet she went forth to meet Polly's "s'prise," a piece of art for art's sake in table decoration.

For once the breakfast-table had been carefully cleared, and a napkin laid over the oilcloth at Dora's place. Upon this Polly arranged everything she thought decorative—a pink-edged plate with a landscape in the centre showing a castle and sundries of knighthood, beyond which plate was a barricade of salt and pepper shakers, alternating red and blue, the middle being guarded by a bisque toothpick-holder—a girl with a basket on her back—and the ends by pink vases with sage-brush and some passé daisies. Inside the barricade were plates of butter, bread, doughnuts, cake, jars of pickles and preserves, and a quart pitcher of cream,—enough to feed three men all told;—one of those grotesquely pathetic labors of love that give you a pang in spite of yourself, and at which you can only gulp—as Dora did: "Why, did you do all that for *me*?"

Polly was in ecstasies. "Yes, I did it all fer you—I've been workin' 'n workin' to git it the way I thought you had it at college, but I didn't know 'zackly how that was, so I hadda guess a lot. Do you—like it?"

"I love it!"

Polly flew into her arms. As they clasped each other, the letter crackled between their bosoms.

"What's that?" Polly felt of it. "Oh, I know—it's the letter." She didn't characterize it—"the letter" was the one missive of import to the family. Dora said nothing and put the child down.

"Dody, won't you show it to us—now?" wheedled Polly, feeling she had just established a claim to special consideration.

"Never."

"Well, then, tell us—that'll do. Tell jes' mamma 'n me."

"Never."

A cloud passed over all three. Mrs. Feruseth brought a pan of sizzling chicken livers to the table, but her smile was gone. Dora felt the edge dull on her own appetite. To how many more people must she refuse to show the letter? For some moments no one spoke. Dora and her mother stared at their plates and picked at their food; Polly stared at both of them, blinking back tears that seemed to be coming, but that didn't quite. Another new vista had opened before her—the unrewarded life!—and she was the pivot of conflicting impulses, one of refusing to be snubbed and set down, the other urging flight with her usual howl: "You're mean—mean—mean—after all I done for you!"

A shout in the distance offered her a saving middle course, with a little of both impulses. Flinging herself and her chair away from the table, she tossed off nonchalantly, "I don't care!" and bounded outdoors, only to come bounding back shouting, "Eric—my darling Eric's comin' over the ridge!" and then scudded away as fast as her little legs could fly.

Her mother was electrified. "My boy's come home—my boy's come home!" she blushed like a schoolgirl, and catching Dora by the hand, fluttered out to meet him as he came loping briskly to the house, Polly standing in his stirrup, his arm about her.

"H'lo, mom'!" he called at her, reining in, and by way of further salutation pushed his stetson on the back of his head, showing a quantity of curly yellow

hair. It never occurred to him to lift his hat to any woman belonging to him—that was a formality reserved for strangers. Though he had addressed his mother, his eyes were devouring his sister, to whom, however, he said nothing.

“That’s Dody got home,” communicated Polly, in a loud stage whisper. “Ain’t you goin’ to speak to her?”—a hint he was glad of, for he didn’t know whether he ought to speak first, or she ought, and he was primed to do the right thing whatever it was. So he told Polly, “Why sure I’m goin’ to speak to her!” and let off an affable “Well, h’lo, Dora.”

She replied stiffly, “How do you do, Eric?” trying to look pleasant.

A pause. It was his turn; so he struck his boot with his quirt and stimulated this: “Well, so y’ got home!”

“Yes, I got home.”

He struck his boot again and brought out: “Quite some stranger in these parts.”

“Yes.”

His turn again! It seemed to come with dreadful rapidity. He ran his hand through the curls on his forehead and found this: “We ain’t seen y’ fer quite some time—I dunno’s as I’d a-knowned y’ if I’d saw y’ on the street.” With which he laughed nervously, pushing his hat a trifle farther back on his head to indicate that he was entirely at ease because not entirely paralyzed.

“And I shouldn’t have known you!” she assured him, making an effort to be nice and say something cordial for good form’s sake, and thinking: “Is it possible that *you* are *my* brother?” There was something preposterous about it all—walking out of the house, and finding yourself guardian to a young man!

It was his turn again, but two slaps with his quirt failed to produce a marketable idea, so conversation lapsed abruptly while he continued to stare at her, telling himself: "She ain't like what I thought—ain't like no girl out here. Looks like one o' them white-winged nurses down there to the hospital."

His mother had stepped a little back of Dora in order to watch the impression her children were making on each other; "first impressions" seemed so important to her—she declared she "went by them entirely" herself, though she didn't, but knowing how Eric went by them—and flew off the handle—she was taking stock of him keenly, and of the impression he was making on which so much depended, and wishing he had fixed himself up instead of coming home looking like that—in a cheap old black sateen shirt with a dowdy red handkerchief around his neck, when he looked so nice dressed up in a white shirt with a blue tie to set off his golden curls. And for Sunday, too! What a shame for the boy to be so careless—that was Addie Rohmer's influence. Well, he'd have to be made to understand a few things, too—now that Dody was home, this slouching around in old rags wouldn't do. Why, even the ranch-hands were putting on white shirts for Sunday! . . . Polly saved the situation for all of them by demanding of him, "Well—my best fella—ain't y' goin' to git off 'n stay to dinner?" and jumped down from her perch beside him.

"Well, I dunno but I will—sence y' ast me to," and turning toward the bunk-house, he shouted: "H'lo, Olaf—Neil—Freddie! One o' you fellas come take muh horse up to th' corral!"

Olaf showed a lathered face for an instant—it was part of his pose to answer such general calls in person—and shouted back: "Leave him be there—I will soon's

as I can!" and popped back, hoping Dora hadn't seen him. He was shaving and prinking up for Sunday dinner, which he had not done the week before. He also had an eye out for "first impressions": himself in a "biled" shirt and new suit that he had not worn since the day of the funeral.

Eric muttered: "Big galoot! Why can't he come when I call?" taking it as a personal slight on his authority. He had an impulse to show everybody who was who on the ranch by riding his horse straight into the bunk-house and leaving him there, but Polly's: "Oh, do hurry up, Eric!" brought him down, and, dismounting in the typical, ungraceful cowboy fashion—a wide sweep of heel to allow for his huge spurs—he caught her with one hand, his mother around the waist, and started with them to the house, leaving Dora to trudge along in their wake as best she might. He hadn't the faintest idea he was treating her discourteously—he was only manoeuvring to get half a minute alone with his mother, just enough to ask, "What's in the letter?" that he might guide his next move.

But his mother saw his bad manners if he didn't—she could almost have sworn that she heard Dora call him a "young cub,"—and, drawing away, she told him: "You and Polly go on ahead"; then, getting Dora affectionately by the arm, she managed to whisper: "The poor boy's so embarrassed he don't know what he's about! You're the first real *young lady* he's ever seen out here, and he don't know hardly what to make of you, or what to say, and findin' you lookin' so beautiful and all dressed up—and him in his common everyday clo'es—why, it makes him feel shy and ashamed. You mustn't forget, darlin', that he's awful sensitive and easy upset—boys that age always are; and we older women have got to make allowances for 'em." The words melted in a sweetly insinuating smile.

Dora was quite mollified with this explanation and its innocent blarney—an adroit bit of boosting if she had chosen to see it that way—and thought: “Poor boy! He really does seem shy!” She found it a new idea and rather amusing that a young man should be so overcome by her; up to date, all the men she’d known—mostly elderly college professors—had overcome *her*. So of course she would make allowances and have tact. It was as if her father’s letter in her bosom said that word to her then—“Tact!”; that was where he had failed with Eric, and she mustn’t. By the time she reached the kitchen, Eric was already sprawled out on a chair, his hat roosting on the extreme back of his head “so he would know where to find it,” Polly roosting on his knee, and he was pulling up her hair-ribbons and informing her in a loud voice: “If these here head-wings o’ your’n grows much bigger, they’re liable fer to fly away with y’ when y’ go outdoors. I guess I better clip ’em off—they make a girl look awful queer anyhow.”

“What about *your* head-wings? they make *you* look awful queer, too! An’ men don’t wear their hats in the house.” With that, she knocked his off on the floor.

“Aw, quit it, Polly—that’s muh new stetson!”

“Who cares?” She kissed him on the end of the nose.

“Aw, say, Polly—” he ducked away from her and tried to reach his hat, but she caught him by the ears with both hands and wagged his head from side to side.

“Now quit it!” There was a sharp note in his voice and he seized her hands in his big paws. He was annoyed though he couldn’t have told why—she had mawled him and pulled his hair since she was old enough to grasp anything in her tiny fists, and he had always thought of her as a sort of human kitten licensed to do as she pleased with a big fellow like him;—until now that Dora sat in front of him. “What’ll yer sister Dora think of y’,” he inquired, “knockin’ muh best Sunday

hat off on the floor?" but sheepishly asking himself: "I wonder what she's thinkin' o' me—puttin' up with such fool tricks as this here!"

Polly stopped on the instant. She'd been trying to show that there was one person in the world she could do as she pleased with, unrebuked; but not for her best doll would she have risked rebuke from him in the presence of Dora, and retorted with pert assurance: "She won't think anything of me, an' I don't care if she does—I know what she thinks anyways. But what I wanta know is: Whadda *you* think of *her*, now y' see what she's like?"

"I think you got yer nerve with y'!—askin' me right in front of her face what I think of her!" Still, he and Dora gave each other a long look, during which his rather hollow chest swelled out as he thought, "Well, she's only a girl after all—what's there to be 'fraid of even if she is muh gardeen?" and at the end of it he brought out: "So you're muh sister Dora!"

"Do I need to show the pink strawberry mark on my left shoulder to prove it?" she twinkled at him: "Or will you take my word for it that I'm your original, authentic sister, returned at last?" A breeze was stirring in her—she thought his method of making conversation one of the funniest things she had ever seen.

He greeted her sally with a guffaw and felt the ice loosen. "Oh, I'll take yer word fer it all right! An' I'll take y' fer muh sister Dora all right! Only, I kinda sorta didn't know y' at first, that's all— I wasn't expectin' y' to look so growed up. I didn't know what y'd be like an' how could I guess—me not seein' y' since y' was the size of Polly here?"

"So you stayed away a week to find out what I was like?" she shot at him blithely.

"Well, I thought I'd leave mom' an' Polly find out first what yer curves was an' gimme the tip if ye're a safe proposition fer me to tackle. A fella wants to know what he's lettin' himself in fer!"

"Oh!" she said, her expression changing. "You thought you would let them bear the brunt of me and save your heels for flight!"

She was sorry the moment the words were out, and she saw his face—they sounded so much worse and so much more than she had meant; for she had shown him she thought him a coward and he had evidently taken it that way. He frowned and looked down at his hands, still holding Polly's, freezing over again as he told himself: "So that's how it is—think's cos' she's boss here, she can start right in callin' me names! Well, I'll show her who's who 'fore she gits much older." But he couldn't think of a word with which either to clear himself of the insinuation that he had let them bear the brunt while he saved himself, or to get back at her for making it.

Nor could Dora think of a word with which to palliate what she had said. To explain that she "hadn't meant anything" would only be to admit that her words were capable of the interpretation he had put on them; to switch the conversation—for the life of her, she couldn't think of anything to switch it to! What in all the world had they in common? The painful silence suddenly fallen on the company their mother attributed in some way to Polly—the child seemed to be striking false notes with both Eric and Dora, and just when it was so important that they should be making friends with each other. . . . Dinner—blessed institution for the furtherance of good feeling! Fill them all up with chicken stew! Providence had led her to decide on chicken stew—Eric loved it better than anything she cooked.

"Why, look at the time! I must get dinner right off," she cried, bustling over to the range and putting wood in. "Dora, you take Eric to the sitting-room and entertain him, then you'll both be out of my way." She gave them an encouraging, maternal smile—a sly little smile, thinking how neatly she had managed that. "I've got to hurry and make extra dumplin's for Eric—I don't want you two 'round under my feet." She snatched up an apron and tied it on, saying: "Shoo, now!" as she did it.

Eric gathered himself together and bounded to his feet, swinging Polly over onto the lounge and dropping her; but she scrambled off and seized his hand—nothing must be missed of the passing show of which he was now the star performer.

"Come back here, Polly," ordered her mother peremptorily. "I need you to help me."

"Need me—to—*help!*" Polly's tone was one of incredulous surprise. "What is there fer me to help with?"

"The dumplin's. And the hard-boiled eggs. Get me six out of the commissary. And the breakfast things to be cleared away."

"But I wanta stay with Eric—I ain't seen him fer mos' two whole weeks." She pressed closer to his side, sure he would take her part. Instead, he snapped shortly: "No—you stay out. Do as mom' tells y'," pulling his hand away from her and opening the door.

Polly looked from one to the other—again her magics had failed. "I think you're mean—mean—mean, both of you," she whimpered; and seeing only thunder-clouds where she looked for the relenting light of love, she howled: "You're all mean! Everybody's mean—in—this—whole—*world!*" and ran sobbing from the house.

Eric simply bolted ahead in impotent disgust, flung

himself into the rocker and began drumming with his fingers on the arms, leaving Dora to pull up a wooden chair for herself and sit down—an operation he watched with great interest while he asked himself: “I wonder if she dolls up like this fer common every day? Er if she done it ’cos she thought I’d be comin’ over? Gosh! She’s got some class to her if she is muh sister! She’s some good-looker!” He was conscious of both pride and pleasure, and that he wanted her to like him; for the moment, he had transferred all his temper to Polly, and had to work it off on a sympathetic listener. He opened up conversation at once with: “Mom’ had ought to do something ’bout the way Polly goes on—I tell y’, it gits on muh nerves to have her howlin’ an’ yowlin’ like she does every time y’ say no to her. An’ she hadn’t ought to be left to stick her nose in everywheres the way she does—she’s gittin’ too big fer it. But I can’t make mom’ see it. All she says is: ‘Ye gotta make allowances fer a little girl that ain’t got no other playmates.’ It ain’t my fault she ain’t got no playmates, an’ I don’t see what’s that gotta do with why she can’t be learnt to mind when she’s spoke to, an’ to keep herself away from where she ain’t wanted by grown folks that can’t *be* her playmates. Anyhow, she’s *gotta* be learnt to keep herself away from the corrals an’ round where thez men doin’ certain things; fer if a check ain’t put on her soon, she’ll have all the fellas talkin’ ’bout her, that’s what. An’ you gotta make mom’ see it—I can’t.”

He was saying all this more to relieve his own temper, and get his bearings with Dora than for any acute concern over Polly, and was a little taken aback when Dora immediately asked, “What things, Eric? I don’t understand,” for the things he had in mind—certain operations on the cattle—he couldn’t have brought

himself to mention to her. But she went on without waiting: "You know I'm awfully green about ranching—really, I don't know anything! It was a tremendously big responsibility to be suddenly thrust upon me and I wasn't prepared for it. You'll have to explain almost everything and help me out all you can. You're the man of the house, you know!" She didn't quite know why she said that last—it came out of itself, and she gave him an appealing, a winning smile.

Ah! That was the way to talk—"man of the house"! He visibly straightened up and answered her smile with his and a cordial "Course I'll help y'—that's what I come home fer to-day," and felt so warmed that he really believed he had come home to help her.

"I need a lot of help!" She gave him another smile.

"You betcher! Why, y' don't know no more 'bout runnin' a ranch than Polly an' the cat!"

"I didn't know as much—when I came!"

He warmed still more at that admission—it showed a modesty he had not been expecting. "It musta been quite some s'prise t' y' when y' did git home and find out what was up—how things was left."

"Surprise!" Words failed her; which he thought quite the way she ought to have felt and warmed still more; enough to gush out what was in his heart: "An' it musta been quite some more of a s'prise when mom' told y' how papa'd left y' our *guardeen*—Polly's an' mine. Why, nobody in the State ever heard o' such a thing as a girl bein' left a *guardeen* like that! If he'd a-left mom' our *guardeen* like he'd ought 'a' done—even one of his friends—a man . . . but to leave a girl—a total stranger to us! Why, I tell y', Dora, folks couldn't believe it when they first heard it—an' wouldn't of, if they hadn't seen it down in black an' white—to think o' him plannin' it an' sayin' nothin'

to nobody fer *years*—then springin' it on us after he was dead! I says to mom', 'I betcher *she* don't like it no more'n *we* do. She'll find out the first week she's home that runnin' a ranch an' playin' gardeeen to her brother Eric ain't goin' to college; she'll find it quite some different.'"

"Different!" she cried, taking his friendliness at its face value, only too glad to feel that somebody understood. It was the first word one of them had said showing an appreciation of her side of the case, and she was a little unduly grateful for it. "It's not only so different from college, but so different from everything I thought it would be!"

"You betcher! An' I says to mom', 'I pity her,' I says, 'comin' back to a ranch in the wilderness after all the folks an' entertainments she's had away to school all these years, an' her havin' no *i*-dear what she's comin' to anyways—mos' likely thinkin' it's one o' them there country houses they have back East that y' see in the papers. She won't know where she's at.'"

"That's just about what I did think," she confided. "So you may know how green I was. I wonder the cows didn't eat me!"

This pleased him more than anything she had said—it was the kind of humor he understood and he felt they were getting on wonderfully, thanks to his own affability. Of course, there was truth in the fiction he was spinning—the actual words were correct if not the tone or original context in which he had said them; whatever his other faults he stopped short of verbal lying. But to do him credit, he was letting himself run away through the excitement of being liked and confided in by a charming young lady whom he desired to please for the sake of her smile, and without the least thought of self-interest, for he had totally forgotten his mother's

cautions to him to keep on the right side of his sister when he did see her. So he conceded generously: "Green! Well, y' can't be blamed fer that! It ain't your fault if they don't teach ranchin' at the college y' was at. An' besides—it ain't woman's work anyways. I think I see mom' straddlin' a horse an' ropin' an' throwin' a steer! That would be a sight!" He flung up his head and laughed at the picture he had created, then explained: "That 'ud be a sight I *wouldn't* wanta see—mom' er one o' *my* sisters workin' with cattle. Not but thez girls can do it all right. I see two at the last fair—come from up in Jackson's Hole—an' I tell y' they beat every fella in the bunch 'cept a half-breed Indian from Pocatello. But all same—ranchin' ain't woman's work, an' I told mom' 'fore you come home; I says, 'I betcher when Dora finds out what she's in fer here, it won't be two weeks 'fore she's packed her doll an' tea-set an' loped back to Syracuse the way all them Eastern teachers does when they come out an' see the little old log schoolhouse.'"

"Oh, I'm not thinking of running away—I'm not such a coward as that, you know!"

"Well, *I* wouldn't blame y' if y' did," he assured her, still swelling with generosity. "Ner nobody else wouldn't—considerin'. Why, it wasn't natural fer a girl to be left to run a ranch—an' her knowin' no more about it than Polly an' the cat; an' nobody wouldn't blame y' if y' didn't like it a little bit. Why, folks out here simply can't believe papa meant it—I don't believe he knew what he meant the time he made his will. But what did he say in the letter he wrote you when he was there to the hospital—one he left to be opened after he died?"

"Why, Eric!" It was rather a gasp as she said it. "That letter was for *me*." Always the letter!

He eyed her, feeling a rebuff, though still so carried away by his friendliness he didn't quite take in what she meant, and repeated, "What did he say?" only to be met with a sharper note: "Why, Eric!"

Then, all at once, something in the depths of them began to growl and bristle. They did not know what it was, but their mother could have told them the moment she looked in their faces. It was the growl of breed against breed; the antagonism and defiance that was in their blood before they were born. In the strange, obscure combination of hereditary traits and taints, their elemental racial substance was rising to the surface, ready to cut its way through superficial likings and personal attractions. Again he asked, "What was in the letter he wrote you?" and she replied: "You know that was a private letter to me—it was marked so—and you ask me what was in it?"

"You mean—you read it—and won't tell—what papa said?" Even then he could scarcely believe his ears.

"Certainly, I shall not tell what my father wrote for me alone!"

The suddenly stiffened back, the close-set mouth and hard eyes, the words and intonation, the sense of an ego centred in its will: his father confronted him in the flesh. For a moment, Eric cowered before the illusion as he had cowered all his life at the words, "Certainly I shall not!" and "No!" from his father; then the illusion did its work—freed the long-smouldering antagonism in the son and directed it on the daughter—a vicarious sacrifice for all those years of misunderstanding and harsh discipline that his mother's heart had bled for and tried to palliate with floods of love and overindulgence. The growl became a snarl: "Look-a-here, I wanta understand this! You mean to say—

to set here an' say in so many words—after everybody in the whole county knows papa wrote something else jes' 'fore he died—some other directions to you 'bout things an' the way they was left—an' all of 'em wonderin' an' talkin' an' guessin' an' sayin' soon's you come home we'd find out what he really did mean—you set there an' say you won't show the letter?"

"What, when it was marked 'confidential,' and *was* confidential? Certainly, I shall not show it!" She, too, was beginning to snarl.

"What's that got to do with it—how it was marked on the outside—now y' read it? It only meant it was fer you to read *first*, that's all."

"You're mistaken," she informed him, making an effort to keep cool. "It was for me alone."

He paused a moment while he nerved himself for an outpouring that would overcome—not her scruples precisely—such scruples as she had expressed were beyond his range, outside his rudimentary moral code—but her secretiveness and her resistance to his wishes, both of which he took personally. So he burst out: "An' how'll folks know it was if I don't see it?—er mom'?—er anybody in the world? What'll folks think of yer actin' so to yer own flesh an' blood, and how'll they know y' ain't concealin' something we'd ought to know—that at the last when he knowed he was dyin' he thought better o' the will an' left me muh rights? An' left Olaf have Bessie's Colt like he oncet said he would?—told Olaf one day, 'Ye're so fond o' that there horse, I'm goin' fer to leave him to y' in muh will'—an' then never done it. *That* wasn't like *him*—though he mighta fergot it at the time he made his will, him thinkin' o' so many other things and talkin' to the lawyer—but he wouldn'ta fergot it when he come to die an' had time to remember all the little things; fer what he said he'd

do, why, *he done it*—no matter if 'twas only to pick up a pin: that was papa, in case y' don't know it! An' you can't make Olaf ner me believe he did fergit it, neither, if y' don't show the letter an' prove it by that! An' everybody else'll think the same an' say it, too, an' you can't prevent 'em, if y' don't show the proofs. They'll say y' don't show that letter 'cos y' got yer reasons fer not showin' it—that yer goin' by the will an' not by the letter, an' keepin' things back from us an' others fer yerself that we don't know nothin' about but that shoulda been give us by rights of last wishes. Why, everybody in the whole county believes that letter was *another will!*"

Outraged through and through, she rose precipitately at this last, towering above him. "How dare you, Eric Feruseth, make such an accusation against me—that I would knowingly keep back anything from you or any one else that my father had trusted me to give you?"

Her blazing indignation struck him like icy sleet in the face, and he huddled down before it, mumbling, as he had huddled and mumbled before the same thing from his father: "I ain't accused y'—I only said y' might—folks round here said y' might—that y' could if y' wanted to an' nobody'd be none the wiser if y' didn't tell. Y' needn't glare at me like that—as if I was the only one said it—*everybody* said it—I'm only tellin' y' what they did say——"

"And you stood by like a coward and let them defame your own sister behind her back when she wasn't there to defend herself!"

"Coward!" The word stung him back to himself and his anger. He had heard it all his life from his father—"moral coward, unable to resist temptation—cats-paw: a coward at heart"—and it was the one name

now the boy wouldn't take from a human soul. He sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing, his fingers crawling over each other, itching to do something to the one who had said that word. "Coward, am I—fer tellin' the *truth*! I'll show y' if I'm a coward—an' I'll see if I git muh *rights*, too! I'll see if I'm to be done outa everything fer a girl. My God! Such *injustice*—nobody ever heard the likes! Us workin' an' workin'—mom' in the house, cookin' an' washin' an' sewin' fer him—me out with the cattle, ropin' an' brandin'—best horse-breaker he ever had—best cow-punch—an' not a cent o' wages, only muh board an' a little pocket-money fer us helpin' him to build up the biggest ranch in the county—one o' the biggest in the State; an' you away all them years an' years havin' a good time while we're slavin' an' toilin'! Then back you come—after y' had everything y' wanted—an' git it all to do as y' damn please with! An' y' not only git it all, but y' git yerself 'pointed our gardeeen to do as y' damn please with Polly an' I! Why, 'cordin' to the will, I even gotta *marry* to suit y'!—me a man, an' you only a girl—girl I didn't even know by sight an hour ago.

"Coward, am I? Think y' can manage me as easy as Polly an' the cat!—think I'm at yer mercy—think 'cause yer muh gardeeen I'll leave muhself be roped, throwed, an' hog-tied by a petticoat papa! Well, by God, that's where y' missed yer guess an' got another one comin'! I had one father, an' he's enough to last a lifetime—I got muh all-fired fill o' bossin' an' naggin' while he lived—got enough to last a hundred years, while you got none at all—an' if y' think I stand to swaller any more from a petticoat papa—er be called names to muh face— Well, you try it—an' find out who's the coward!

"Coward! Look-a-here, Dora Feruseth—sister er no

sister—gardeen er no gardeen—law er no law—I never took dictation from man, woman, er child on what I gotta do an' not do, who I gotta marry er not marry, an', by God, I take none from a bunch o' college calicoes! You try it on me oncet—you put on any o' them high-handed airs—you start any o' this here Sunday-school talk that goes with a white dress an' a holy-angel smile—you begin any o' yer meachin'-preachin' piety 'bout me drinkin' when I feel like it, er gamblin' when I feel like it—you try any o' that on me, an' see how long y' last. Coward! Huh!" He thumped his chest defiantly, swelled it out with a big breath and let off: "This is one 'coward' o' the kind we make out here—kind that ain't afraid o' girls! This is one 'coward' that'll git his natural rights in spite of y', so go ahead an' do yer damnest! This is one 'coward' y' can't dictate to, but if y' want an *enemy*, y've started in the right way, an' y've found one—*right here!*"

He thumped his chest again to show her where, snapped his fingers in her face, and without waiting to hear a word, or even to discover how she had taken his attack, he flung out of the room slamming her in behind him. That was his usual custom—*bang, slam, silence!* His mother's usual custom was to apply cake and kisses as soon as she could catch him. Dora stood there rooted to the spot, dumfounded.

CHAPTER X

THREE minutes later her mother flung the door wide with another slam and rushed in, her eyes blazing, and demanding: "What have you done to Eric? What have you said to him? What do you mean by driving my boy out of house and home? This is my house—I have the use of it under the will—he's my child and has as much right to his home as you have. What do you mean by driving him out of it?"

"Driving him out? Did he say—*that*?"

"Say!—he said nothing at all—not one word—he was too upset. He went through the kitchen and out like a shot—and off—without so much as kissing me good-by—the first time in his life he ever went off without kissing his mamma, and me not even knowing he was gone! I was busy cutting up the hard-boiled eggs for the chicken gravy so I didn't look up to notice when he went through—only enough to catch a glimpse of him; but I was all done but the two eggs, so I sent Polly to run tell him and call the men that dinner'd be on the table in a minute—I only had to dish up the stew—and back she comes racin' to say he's *gone*!—rode off the ranch. Olaf was just leadin' his horse up to the corral, and he snatched the reins away from him and rode off without so much as a word to me in there getting dinner for him, and without an idea there was anything wrong between you two. He says he's going straight to Laramie for a writ to make you produce the letter and prove his father didn't relent on his death-bed and leave him his rights in the end, and he's going to

start proceedings to break the will. He told Olaf and Polly that you'd refused him his rights here—that you'd called him names and driven him out of house and home!"

Dora gave a sharp "Oh!" then stopped. What was there to say to such accusations from such a source? What was the use of lowering her dignity by even trying to explain what had happened? Hadn't she been insulted enough for one day? She thought she had!

But her mother had paused only for breath—she was there to do the talking and explaining, and she didn't care whether Dora explained or not, and went rushing on: "Things are comin' to a pretty pass in this house—my house, I'll ask you to remember—in which Eric and Polly have as much rights as you have, even if you are their guardeen—it's their home and I won't have either one of them driven out of it no matter what they do to offend your ideas of how things ought to be done or not done. *I'm* the one to say how things shall be done in my own home; and I'm the one to say who shall stay in it and who shall not."

Suddenly her expression of angry self-assertion turned wolfish—a look bristling with defiance, suspicion, and defense: the mother saw her daughter as an alien, a stranger ruling her house and her son; and almost in the same moment, the stranger became—James Feruseth: from that living centre, the past years of misunderstanding and harsh discipline stretched out into the future. "Dear God! Is my boy always to be abused and driven beside himself?" she cried. It was bitterness for him that filled her tone and nerved her defiance. "I'm the one to say—I'm the one to lay down whatever laws are laid down here—and you may's well understand it first as last. You hadn't been home an hour before you began layin' down the law at Polly on

how she should eat at table. I put up with it then and since to avoid a fuss, but I never dreamed you'd start right in layin' down laws at Eric the minute he stepped his foot inside the door—him a grown man over six foot tall if he is only nineteen, and accustomed to do as he thinks best—I couldn't of believed it of you if anybody'd told me. The way you act, it seems as if you're bent and set on makin' enemies, not only of the men workin' on the ranch, but of your own sister and brother—your own flesh and blood. Well, if that's your idea—and I don't know what else it can be after this performance—let me tell you one thing: *Whoever makes an enemy of one of my children, makes an enemy of me!*"

Having fired this gun, she sank into the rocker, and Dora, not knowing what else to do, took the chair she had risen from. Neither looked at the other, but both were collecting all their inner forces of attack and defense, feeling their whole future depended on their coming to an understanding then and there. As for allowing Eric and Polly to do as they pleased in her house so long as she was satisfied with their conduct, their mother was declaring to herself she would "die sooner than yield one inch to a James in petticoats." But she was afraid to say it openly, lest Dora turn on her openly and say: "Either you'll yield, or I'll go." Feminine intuition and maternal enlightenment told her mother that those words were hovering on her daughter's tongue, ready to drop off—it was why she had so hastily sat down: now she had her, she had no intention of letting Dora go again, or of giving her anything that might serve as a pretext and excuse for a pointblank alternative for anybody or anything.

But the dilemma she left at large in the atmosphere was much more serious than whether Polly and Eric

should be allowed to do as they pleased in her house. There are situations in which retreat, even flight, seems not only the part of wisdom, but a moral obligation to others; and that was what Dora found herself facing now: so far as she could see, for her to stay and try to live with these people, as things were between them and her, meant irretrievable loss to all concerned. It wasn't as if she didn't see their side—she saw it now so clearly that it undermined her power of decision; she could actually put herself in their place and sympathize with their feelings against herself!—which wasn't pleasant, or conducive to the carrying out of plans for uplift and betterment anywhere. She had already seen that the ranch life was a closed circle to her—she was an outsider to her own home, her own flesh and blood. That was bad enough to have to live with, but to be their *enemy*! as she had just been told, after all she had tried and wished and meant and hoped to do for them! The word “enemy” stuck straight up in her mind like the tent-pole of a tent demolished by a tornado; in the general wreckage lay her ideas of betterment and uplift, duty, obligation, responsibility, ideals, out of which she was too dazed, too hurt and humiliated to extract a common-sense plan that would work. “I their enemy! Why, it's terrible—preposterous—incredible!” she was inwardly protesting. “How can they think such things of me—my own brother accuse me of trying to rob them! And now everybody in the whole county will go on believing it if I don't show father's letter—show these crass creatures his heart, his lonely life and struggles that he concealed from them to the end! Betray him!” That was where *she* would rather die than yield an inch!

But her mother's tornado hadn't left even a pole sticking up to mark the place where her inner life

and family relationships had once lain tented and secure; and she sat there groping amidst broken thoughts in bewildered silence, dreading she knew not what. "Such doings as this day's I never saw in my life, never. . . . My children don't show me one particle of consideration—much they care for the mother that bore them in pain and sorrow—not one of them cares. . . . Care for nobody but themselves, but you'd think a girl who had been to college ten years . . . making enemies of her own flesh and blood—away at college ten years and come home to act like this . . . laying down laws at everybody on the ranch—nobody'll stand for it. . . . You'd think college would learn them *something*—some gratitude. . . . If it only learnt them a little common sense, not act like this the minute they get home. . . . It's time and money thrown away—I told her father that years ago, and here's the proof if he'd lived to see it—driving my boy out of house and home without kissing his mamma good-by, or so much as a word—first time he ever did such a thing in his life. . . ." And below these mutterings, shining up through the gaps like a red ribbon, ran the thought: "I wonder what he did to her to set her off like this?" She knew Eric! She also was beginning to know Dora, and something in the girl's poise, her reserve in explanation and blame, her atmosphere of probity—perhaps her very remoteness from the family's world with its passions and possessions—was causing her mother to swerve out from under Eric's influence and regard him in a new light. She timidly raised her eyes and saw before her a statue. Since the statue remained motionless, apparently unconscious that any one else was in the room, her gaze grew bolder, and her thoughts more coherent. Every line in that rigid white figure proclaimed moral rectitude and injured innocence; and

by one of those curious, subtle, inversion processes in women's minds, because Dora hadn't uttered a word of blame for Eric, his mother began to think he probably deserved it! After staring a minute, she felt sure he did; and within another minute she had gone over to Dora's side and was secretly upbraiding him for "showing off and carrying on with no more common sense or regard for others than a bull in a china-shop after all the warnings he had had to behave like a gentleman and remember that his sister was a grown-up young lady who had been to college and knew a great deal more than he did." Poor soul, she was only too glad of an excuse to believe the best of all her children and everybody else, though often the only way she could do it was by shifting blames from one to another, releasing her dear ones turn and turn about as suited her own needs of the moment.

At the end of five minutes she wanted to "make up" with Dora more than anything else in the world, and was sighing inwardly: "If she'd only make up with her brother and be more like the rest of us!" which meant if Dora would only *give up* everything she stood for; give up the precious, intangible obligations her soul owed to the memory of what her father had striven for and endured: an idea her mother couldn't have conceived, wouldn't have admitted; for the impulse she felt was the inarticulate, insatiable instinct of the weak and indolent—the psychasthenia inherent in democracies—to rid itself of prods to effort by making the strong give up their efforts and ideals and come down to the level of the common herd.

At the same moment another thought occurred to her: "Eric's got to give up some of his ways, now she's home—he needs one good taking down to show him he can't go riding roughshod over everybody, and treating

the mother that bore him in pain and sorrow as if she were the dirt beneath his feet he can fling aside without a word of good-by. He'll have to learn there are some things he can't do in this house—not while I've got a grown-up daughter who's been to college to stand up for her mother!" Impelled by all these thoughts and feelings, and stimulated by the prospect of capturing a powerful ally to boot, Mrs. Feruseth opened her campaign.

"Eric has such a hasty temper," she began meditatively, "but he don't mean half he says."

Dora looked up, thinking, "We're about to have '*Wyoming wind*' dished up again!" but she said nothing.

"I hope you didn't think he did."

Silence.

"It don't pay to take things too seriously with him—make a mountain out of a mole-hill."

Silence.

"You didn't, did you?"

"Just what precisely do you refer to, mother?"

"Why, what you said to him in here—what he said to you—what he got mad at, or whatever it was made him rush off the way he did without kissing me good-by, or so much as saying a word," she floundered, watching Dora narrowly and pretending not to. "He was in a temper—he showed it on Polly before he come in here—so of course, he said things—he always does—he's so easy upset. And besides, he was excited—you just home, and him comin' over so glad to see you——"

Dora greeted this with a sarcastic "Huh!" that made her mother answer hastily: "Dody, he was glad to see you! I read it in his eyes even if he didn't say it out. I know what's in his heart, but he's bashful

like all boys of his age before strangers. He can't help it—he grew too fast—he hasn't got his man strength yet—he don't hang together tight enough in his limbs; it makes him awful awkward, and he feels it, but he don't know what's the matter with him. They don't—no young men does when they're like that, when they get to the loose-knit stage growin' too fast for their strength; they're so sensitive a look sends 'em off the handle, so you've got to make allowances and wait till they *knit up*. The only way to get on with 'em at all is *to* make allowances: *never* let 'em see you don't think everything they do's all right."

As she expounded this simple philosophy which seemed so adequate to her, she saw her daughter's lip curl, and then received a sharp "You mean that when he's morally wrong in an act—or in a request, or a statement—that I'm to let him think he's *right* because he's in the loose-knit stage?"

Trapped by this lucid and unexpected formulation, her mother hesitated, warned that she approached a "setting down," but she evaded a direct yes or no in her usual way. "You don't have to *say* one way or the other, as I can see—don't have to tell him he's right or wrong unless he out and out asks you. Then I suppose—" She paused to keep from committing herself and added with a smile: "But they never ask! They don't want to know—boys and men don't—when they're wrong; not from a woman, anyways. All they want from a woman is to be loved and admired—made over when they come home—coddled and petted, and if you don't make over 'em why they don't come home, that's all—they stay away with women that do make over 'em—like that Rohmer girl where he's gone now."

For the moment Dora couldn't speak. This abrupt revelation of the young male's foibles and lack of moral

stamina, falling upon her own white, starched Puritanism, filled her with disdain.

During the pause, her mother thought she saw light ahead. She understood Eric's quick tantrums and his easy penitences, and after she had submitted to the one, she played on the other to bring him back to her, docile and affectionate till the next ebullition. She would get her hand again on the steering-gear—through Dora. "So you must let him know you're willing to make allowances," said she complacently. "That you know he didn't mean anything and he's sorry for everything he said—for he didn't mean anything—he promised me before you come home that he'd treat you properly, no matter what——"

"Promised — you — he'd — treat — me — properly!" gasped Dora. "Why, he simply insulted me!"

"Eric—*insulted*—you!" Her mother straightened up in her chair. "Insulted" had in general but one significance for her, and she couldn't quite get her bearings. But looking into the clear, young face before her, now flushed with indignation, her mother love and pride surged up as it had so often, and she was shocked that her son's conduct, whatever it was, could call forth such an expression from a lady—and the one person in the world she wanted him to appear at his best with, if only for his own interests and happiness. "I don't understand," she murmured, helplessly. "What did he do to you—what did he say—to make you feel—*insulted*?"

"That letter of my father's—written to me on his death-bed about things he wanted me to do for him—a private letter for me alone, as you know—Eric has taken it into his head to believe it was a last wish about the property—even a last will—I don't know what; but he accused me of concealing the contents

in order to hide gifts my father left for others and keep them for myself! Oh, mother, do *you* believe me capable of such treachery?"

She leaned forward impulsively in quick appeal, blood calling to blood for a little understanding, a little justice, a little human sympathy; and her mother, quite forgetting that she had herself put the idea into Eric's head originally, rose to the occasion with a warm "Never! Never could I believe that of a child of mine!"

She was all on Dora's side now, her feelings taking on the color of Dora's indignation, and adding some of her own. Poor, dear girl—just home after all these long years—to be so abused, insulted in her own home, called a thief by her own brother, after all his mother's warning—and such a girl as *that*! Something ought to be done to him! She did the most she could, exclaiming: "It's outrageous!—the most outrageous thing I ever heard! It's cruel—it's wicked—I can't imagine what got into him to say a thing like that! He ought of known better—ought of known his sister wouldn't do what he wouldn't do; and if he knows anything, he knows I've brought my children up truthful and honest as the day. Such insinuations!—he must of been out of his head! I declare there are times when the boy seems *possessed*—I don't know what else to make of the way he rides roughshod over everybody and everything in his way, neither looking nor caring whose feelings get hurt, or what outrageous insinuations he makes that he can't back up with proof. . . . But I don't know what more you could expect, considering the friends he has—Posey Burnham and all that crowd of cow-punchers and horse-wranglers hangin' round down there to Rohmer's ranch and Alec Moore's horse-camps. Lawless, wild—they're up to everything, and they put him up to their

deviltry—he'd never dream of doing the things he does if they didn't put him up to it. Mark my words, it's them put him up to accusing you! But I don't know what better you could expect from fellas of that stamp."

This last was the happy inspiration of the moment: she felt that by shifting the blame from Eric to his friends, she would assure him an extra measure of "allowances." What she got for it in return was a sharp, indignant "Well, *I* should expect him to choose friends worthy the splendid father he had—it's what he ought to do."

It hadn't yet dawned on Dora that she alone had seen the vision of her father as a noble, solitary soul, striving to live by its ideals—a soul to pattern by, and that to the rest of the family he was the tyrant of the everlasting NO.

Her mother was completely taken by surprise and thrown off guard by the sudden swooping down of this reply out of the blue upon her feelings and concessions, and pouncing on the bare bones of moral obliquity in the boy she had been secretly trying so hard to defend and secure in his sister's good graces, and the reference to "splendid father," and "ought" found the hidden sore spot in her heart she had thought dead and buried with the man. In an instant, her mood, her attitude, everything changed—again she was Eric's mother facing the alien.

"Ought—ought—ought—this everlasting moralizing about what people ought to do!" she cried passionately. "How do *you* know what Eric ought to do—you knowing no more of men than a nun? How does anybody know what anybody ought to do? They do the best they can—that's all the ought there is to anything. Dear Lord! When your father died, I thought I was through with moralizing, and *oughts* forever—seemed as if I had a

right to be after I'd stood 'most twenty-five years of it—ought—ought—ought—you ought, he ought, she ought! I hate the very word. It began when you were born. No mother ever loved a baby more than I loved you, but that wasn't enough for him—I ought to do things differently; I ought to hedge you with all sorts of restrictions—I ought to punish you for every trifle—deny you every little pleasure—I ought always to be thinking what was *good* for you at some future time, not what you wanted at the only time you're sure of—*now!* . . . Then came Eric, and *what you see that boy to-day, your father made him by his harshness!* Ought—ought—ought—there was no end to it. And you can sit there, and talk about him choosing friends worthy of his childhood's tyrant! The wonder to me is the boy ain't a criminal this day—and he owes it to mother-love that stood between him and his father's cruelty that he ain't behind the bars. Splendid father! Yes he was—in his way, and as well as he knew how to be; but it's a pity you weren't home all those years to see what went on under the surface. Why, when Bennie died in convulsions, your father blamed *me*—his own mother—said I'd killed my own baby with overindulgence—that I ought to have done thus and so, and then some other way. It was the same when Eva died of summer complaint—overindulgence—I oughtn't to have given her strawberries! As if strawberries ever hurt anybody!—fresh ones—a present to us. He expected me to let the poor baby set up to table with us and watch us eat 'em, longin' and beggin' for a taste and give her none. When he said she's not to have any, I said she could have mine. And she did, too! And I've had at least that comfort since she died—she had my strawberries—I didn't refuse 'em to her, and it was the last thing she ever asked for. The doctor said it was the

milk that year give the babies summer complaint all through the county—he told your father so—but he harped on those strawberries for ten years. I oughtn't of given 'em to her, then the milk wouldn't of hurt her!

"By the time Polly came, I'd stood all I could—I was through with moralizing. I told him plainly when she was three years old that if he didn't stop pickin' and naggin' at her, I'd leave him for good and all and go home to Ireland. I meant it—I was ready to go—I'd stood all the restrictions I was equal to for one life. There's a limit to all things. A mother that can set still and see her children restricted—denied every little pleasure—see their little eager faces lit up smilin' and their little hands reached out to you—'Mamma, can I have this?' and say '*No—you oughtn't to have it*'—when it's perfectly harmless—'no—no'—why, she ain't fit to be a mother!

"And he—always and always moralizing. A grand man in the community—a good man—honest—upright—everybody looks up to him and respects him—calls him a splendid father. . . . And in his home to his children, *hard as nails!* With no more feeling than—Laramie Peak—just one big 'ought.' I don't say he didn't do his duty—I don't say he didn't try to make the children love him, but how does a man know how a mother feels about the child you've carried and nursed at your breast—washed and dressed and put to sleep? How does anybody but a mother know? . . . How do *you* know?"

She hadn't meant this as a question, but had flung it off as a sort of challenge to a world that couldn't understand, and hung poised on the crest of this wave of hallowed miseries from a dim past, hardly aware that she had stopped speaking, looking fixedly into her daughter's eyes.

The Celt seems to possess the peculiar faculty, when emotion has become wild and loose in the soul, of projecting the listener into a state of clairvoyant vision; and as her mother's voice ceased, Dora became conscious of two vivid images of her father—her own and her mother's, side by side, and saw with extraordinary clarity how her father had been both. At the same moment she perceived two images of her mother—his, that he had hinted in the letter; and her own, built up spontaneously from that passionate outpouring—a blind, loving heart, groping, suffering, loyal, understood no more than she had understood—two people whose vision inverted the other's best into a worst and accepted it as a portion. Through no fault of theirs but the destiny imbedded in the fibre of their beings had life together been a hidden tragedy for both. . . . And she, the daughter, offspring of both, sat there, seeing the truth too late to palliate the relation for either one, and herself the living reminder of heartaches that should have been buried in the grave. . . .

All at once, her mother held out her hands—pitiful, toil-worn hands, stained and dirty with work, hands that had been so willing for her children, never tired in their service, endlessly doing unpleasant tasks for her babies—hands that shook now with emotion as she reached them to her daughter:

"Don't, Dody, don't! Don't be so hard on us for every little thing you see ought to be different—every little thing you don't understand. Don't be your father all over again, ruling with a rod of iron. We need you—to love us."

With a swift movement, the girl fell on her knees and buried her face in her mother's breast.

CHAPTER XI

MOMENTS of clairvoyant lucidity between two individuals are apt to have peculiar disadvantages: they throw the will out of action and leave the situation more difficult to manage than it was before; for such illumination changes opinion without changing either character or the circumstances in which character must work out its destiny. It was thus with Dora. Her brief outpouring of contrition and affection was followed by a return of rather more than her usual reserve: she even wondered how she had let herself go to the extent of flinging herself into her mother's arms; and then, rather mysteriously, as the result of that impulse, the girl found herself confronting the stark realities of life, as it flowed along, in a way she had not done before: she had been accepted as one of the family, so to speak, and her feet were tramping the daily treadmill in lock-step with the rest—a treadmill there suddenly seemed no way of ever again escaping. Yet within her soul she was still fighting a battle with a world alien to the core of her. Floods of affection couldn't alter her fundamental Puritanism and the character she had inherited from her father. She had never had—and no illumination could give her—the uncritical indolence that "gets used to things" as the cheap excuse for lack of effort in upholding one's standards; and besides, she believed firmly in "the divine discontent." But it wasn't merely that the external elements of her life jarred her sensibilities—the thing cut deeper than sensibilities; the illumination, if it had shown her nothing else, showed her that every point of view, every ambition, every attitude she came

in contact with was alien to her; and many seemed morally wrong. The very structure of the day's work fretted her. Systematic by nature, accustomed for years to rise, go to meals, chapel, study, recreation with the stroke of a bell, and to make every one of those carefully counted hours tell somewhere in a plan of achievement, this easy-going life of makeshift and disorder drove her almost frantic. Only the meals were fairly regular—they had to be for the men; but dishes were piled and left unwashed for two or three meals at a time if her mother had company or went to ride; and she generally baked at night, always having Polly sit up with her. Polly would throw herself on the kitchen lounge, and in the sweltering heat of the tight-closed room she would sleep till one or two o'clock in the morning, then be kissed awake and carried off to bed just as she was, except for her shoes. In the morning, her mother "freshened her up" with strong, black coffee before Dora saw her.

Dora, who went to bed regularly at ten, was some time in discovering this bit of household management, though she had noticed the results and had puzzled over Polly's peculiar condition on certain days. Polly finally explained it in an offhand way: "Well, y' see it was bake-night yestiddy, an' I haven't had my clo'es off fer so long I feel all sorta *scratchy an' outchy*."

Here, surely, was a case that called for prompt remonstrance from a responsible guardian, wasn't it? and Dora at once told herself: "A growing child must have its sleep! Ought I not to set my foot down before she's turned into a nervous wreck and say flatly she *shall* go to bed no later than nine, bread or no bread? Isn't that what father put me here for?—to save that poor child. Can't I find some way to make mother see what she's doing?"

Being what they both were, she couldn't. For maternalism without consecration is a blight, and the naked maternal instinct is always callous to everything but the creature needs and pleasures of its young. Mrs. Feruseth could work her fingers to the bone for a child, but she couldn't forego her child's society, or sacrifice her feelings for its sake: she couldn't see its good in those terms: she must have the child with her; the instinct admitted no argument. As Dora knew, it was simply a case for pointblank authority of guardian against mother; but even for the sake of the child, doesn't one owe the mother some consideration? Dora decided to use a great deal of tact and mildly suggest that it wasn't good for Polly to sleep in the kitchen on bread nights.

"Why shouldn't she stay with me in the kitchen?" protested her mother, beginning to flare at once. "Timid little child—alone in her bed—wolves howling out on the range! Why, it's enough to give her convulsions!"

"Then couldn't you arrange to bake by daylight?"

"Bake by daylight!" snorted her mother. "If you don't like the way bread is made in this house, you're welcome to make it yourself! But we might as well settle once for all who's Polly's *mother*—who has the right to put restrictions on her!"

"Now, mother, please—" began Dora; and she put her right fist into her left hand and squeezed her knuckles, trying to keep very cool and impersonal. She didn't know it was a trick of her father's, and that every time for years her mother had seen it, her heart sank, for it announced: "My will be done!" It was all her mother needed now to make her blaze out: "Have you any more *orders* to give Polly's *mother*? Suppose—to save time—and misunderstanding in the future—you write

out a list of what I'm to do—when I'm to get up and go to bed—when I'm to bake and not to bake—when I'm permitted to go to ride and when I'm to stay home—what clo'es you wish me to put on and how I'm to do my hair and Polly's—and then tack it on the kitchen wall so's the men can see it and everybody else that comes to the house. It'll give 'em something to talk about—the way my daughter learnt at college to regulate the mother that bore and nursed her!”

Dora looked at her for a moment; then said enigmatically: “I'm sorry.”

Her mother felt a pang at that, and muttered, already beginning to cool off: “I sh'd think you might be sorry—trying to put restrictions on your mother and sister in everything they do! . . . But, oh, Dody, why can't you just love us as we are? We need you to love us.”

It was the pattern scene between them—a pattern reaction of her mother's character: first a fervid protest against restrictions, then a fervid appeal for love, and not quite so artless as it seemed; for in that former brief moment of abandonment she had discovered one secret of managing her daughter—the magic words, “We need you to love us,” and kept them suspended like the sword of Damocles over Dora's head ready to drop on her if she showed the smallest disposition to criticise, or to offer even mild suggestions for changing things. Nothing on earth could make Mrs. Feruseth see these as anything but *impositions* and *restrictions*, and the fear of restrictions had become a mild mania, a madness in miniature, as it does, sooner or later with every one living in the Wyoming plains country. It is the profoundly dominating and remorselessly invading spirit of the plains, as if the vast expanses of land and sky, the dim horizons, the presenceless void released the

mind from its natural sense of pattern and standard, leaving the instinct of non-conformity unconfined, free to overflow its bed, inundating the moral and spiritual man. This is why socialism flourishes, why such democracy as there is tears down everything to its level in the name of freedom and equality: always the insidious invitation of dim horizons to ignore the guide-posts: always the fear of restrictions flooding minds formed to formlessness by the prevailing landscape; and this fear—the activating principle of non-conformity, the vital essence of anarchy—is the specific contribution of the West to the lowering and disintegrating forces of American civilization.

After a quarter of a century in Wyoming, Mrs. Feruseth had her full share of it, though it seldom had occasion to show on the surface; but she was now on the watch for impositions and restrictions in everything, and ready to go through the pattern scene on very slight provocation; and along with her irritation she had frequent periods of silent sulking. She was aggrieved that having taken Dora to her heart—she having come of her own accord besides—she didn't gush and hug and kiss the way Polly did. Mrs. Feruseth couldn't understand it; to her, when ice was broken between two people, it was broken for all time; nothing could ever come between them again. And unpleasant questions began to stir and lurk about in her mind—does she really love her mother? or was her feeling all put on?—and they reinforced with ever-renewed vitality the opposition that had been in her heart since she had read the will. But Dora, meeting this opposition in one form or another at almost every turn, yet not recognizing it as the prevailing spirit of the country, could only take its manifestations as personal to herself. How was she to meet this continual undercurrent

of resentment? How was she to better anything—or even fulfil her obvious duty? What was lacking in herself? She didn't know.

What she felt she needed—what she was beginning for the first time in her life to hunger for—was personal help: some one to tell her *just how* to deal with such a mother—such a sister and brother—such a situation as her father's will had entailed upon her. But where was she to find this personal help? What human friend was available in her hour of need? Not one; she was utterly alone; saw that no matter how hard she tried she didn't know how to fit in; and her sense of inadequacy and discouragement often ended in moments of melancholy desolation. And thus her thoughts turned inevitably to the spiritual world, only to fall back to earth as she gazed at the plains and thought of her father's words: "I lost God on the plains."

But all her perplexities, her gropings for the wise course, her self-examinations and strivings were aggravated by the fact that she had absolutely no privacy; no chance to think her difficulties out into a working plan. Even with all the external meagreness, she felt she could make some sort of a life for herself if she could have her evenings; could go on with her reading and studying as for years she had been accustomed to.

It was here, once things had settled themselves into the daily rut, that she faced the crux of the situation so far as living any life of her own was concerned; for she discovered that ranch etiquette, so loose everywhere else, was rigid on one point—one's only alternative to herding with the entire crowd was going straight to bed in one's little white-washed cell: to retire to the sitting-room to read by oneself was unforgivable. Which meant being herded into the kitchen with her mother and Polly and the ranch-hands—three men, reeking

and odoriferous from their day's work, tilted back against the wall, chewing toothpicks, smoking, paring and cleaning their nails, guffawing over colored Sunday supplements, playing old maid and checkers; Polly, showing off before the men, mercilessly staring, and pawing and clawing her sister; her mother aimlessly chattering, repeating the entire happenings of the day; Olaf rattling along on the happenings outdoors, and every so often casting at Freddie a pugnacious glance; Neil glum and silent, appearing not to know what was going on until there came a pause in the conversation; then he would boom at Dora in his bull voice: "Whadda y' think o' socialism? Ain't the laborin' man bound to win out 'gainst the cap't'list an' overthrow Standard Oil?"

She didn't know in the least what she thought about socialism, and told him so each time he asked, and each time she told him so, he propounded: "Well, ye're *fer* it, ain't y'?" To which she was always careful to explain: "I don't know whether I am or not—I know literally nothing about it." And when he got that, he boomed back: "Well, I can tell y' this—the laborin' man's *bound* to win out 'gainst the cap't'list an' overthrow Standard Oil—he's *bound* fer to git his rights—them cap't'lists can't keep on ridin' an' robbin' him forever."

The first time Dora had it flung at her head she was rather interested and pleased—it "showed the man was thinking"—and she saw a chance for "uplift." By the tenth time, however, she saw the man wasn't thinking at all—and couldn't think if he wanted to; he could only parrot off a few stock phrases that had been carefully dinged into him by others. With that broadside, Neil's conversation was exhausted for the evening, but he returned to the charge the next evening in the hope

that by that time she would have taken a stand either for or against, and he could slug that stand. Like all of his class, his powers of argument began and ended there—in making a person take a stand in so many words, then slugging the stand with quotations. In three weeks she came to dread him; and when the dread struck her she always found Freddie Woodhull's white-lashed eyes blinking at her like a little owl and saying: "I'm waiting, too—it will drop in a minute!" and his furtive smile seemed to flit from one member of the company to another and come back to her with an invitation: "Why don't you confide your troubles to me? *I* can understand—I'm the only one here who guesses what you're going through with all this; but—*I know.*" And every time she saw that look on his face, she felt somehow sullied, and loathed him more than all the rest put together. She didn't, of course, realize that she herself was the star attraction and actual cause of this anomalous "family" gathering; for when she wasn't there, the men loafed about the kitchen for half an hour at most, and out of courtesy to Mrs. Feruseth more than anything else. In their simple-hearted kindness it didn't seem quite the thing to eat what she had taken so much pains with, and run right off again, leaving her alone; but they had never been slow in betaking themselves to their bunk-house and the stories they couldn't repeat before her and Polly. As for Dora, she simply stood it until she had reached the limit of her moral and social endurances; then in a moment of desperation she cut her Gordian knot by taking a lamp and going off by herself to the sitting-room.

Hardly had she opened her book when her mother and Polly burst in upon her, demanding in one breath: "What are you doing, Dody?"

"Reading—or rather just about to."

"Off here—by yourself?" Her mother surveyed her with obvious disapproval and then asked coldly: "Is there any reason why—if you're goin' to read instead of makin' yourself agreeable to the family and helpin' entertain the men—you can't read aloud to all of us?"

The book happened to be Mills's "Logic"—one of her father's that she had chosen for something to wrestle with; and for a moment she had a naughty desire to take her mother up and read it aloud to the family; but she curbed that naughty feeling by saying her charm, "I must have tact," and answered in gentle tones: "Well, yes, there is a reason: what I'm going to read wouldn't interest anybody but myself; so I won't inflict it on the company."

Her mother was prompt to meet that: "Then choose something that would. There's 'Molly Bawn' and 'East Lynne,' and others of mine on the shelf; and under that, there's a whole shelf of old *Munsey's*, full of nice stories. You got plenty here to choose from if yours ain't interestin'—there's no reason why you should be obliged to pick a book nobody cares for but yourself, as I can see."

"Except that I happen to like it," returned Dora, beginning to feel irritated in spite of her good resolves.

Her mother made a sign to Polly, who hastily selected a volume of crude jokes and pictures, and a sweet tale of a religiously inclined child named Ruby, and offered them with a wheedling: "You ain't read Ruby but jesta oncet to me, Dody. But if y' don't like that, we can read jokes."

She waited a moment in the hope that her sister, thus assisted and importuned, would arise and fare forth to the kitchen for the entertainment of herself and the

hired men; then inquired in surprised tones, as her sister didn't budge: "Ain't you comin' out?"

"No, Polly, not to-night." It was now or never that Dora must take her stand for the freedom of her evenings. It brought from her mother a somewhat sharp "Are you sick? Have you got a headache, or something the matter with you?"

"No, there's nothing the matter; only—I must have some little time to myself," she forced herself to answer.

"You have all day," grumbled her mother. "Nobody interferes with what you do or how much you read; and anybody would think that was about enough time to read in without absenting yourself from the family evenings—if you ain't sick enough to go to bed. Absenting yourself so pointed, too!—the men out there waiting. If you can't read aloud—though why you should object to givin' Polly that pleasure—a child that has so few pleasures—I can't see,—then come out and tell about your college. You hardly opened your head on it yet—anybody might think there's some secret about it you don't want known, the way you keep everything so to yourself. You away ten years and not a word to tell about it when you come home to your own mother and sister! Olaf was saying only the other day when I was dishing dinner he wondered what you'd been doing with yourself all those ten years—summers and all—that you had nothing to tell; he wondered if you'd had the good time we all thought you was havin' from the way you wrote home."

Dora set her lips and stared at her open page—always what "folks were saying"! But she wouldn't have another scene with her mother—it was too humiliating.

Polly had an inspiration. "I know what y' can do if y' don't wanta read er talk—come out an' sing yer college songs an' show us how they danced!"

That was the last straw for Dora!—the picture of herself out in the kitchen playing mountebank to amuse her hired men! She burst into hysterical laughter; it saved her from hysterical tears.

"I don't see what you find to laugh at," snapped her mother, flushing to the roots of her hair; she took it personally and as a sign of disrespect before Polly. She waited while Dora went through another gust at that, then commanded Polly, "Come out of here—" hustling the child to the door. "A girl that can set there and make fun of her own mother and sister—" the door slammed them out. Mrs. Feruseth finished the evening in a fit of silent sulking, telling herself over and over that she "asked so little of Dora as it was, it was a pity the girl couldn't make the least effort to be agreeable; and if *that* was how girls were taught to behave in college to their own mothers, well, Polly should never go!"

But Dora was no longer deceived by her mother's demand for her company on every occasion; she was well aware by this time that her mother found her something of a damper and a trial—that their difference of "world" oppressed as well as irritated her. But the feeling that urged her mother on was a strange mixture of subconscious impulses and the vague stirrings of new ideas; pique that Dora didn't "make over" her and gush the way Polly and Eric did; curiosity that grew instead of lessened the more she saw of the girl; and timidity before the silence and reserves that seemed to hide vast depths of learning and thought;—all these were slowly churning about in her, now one, then another coming briefly to the surface. The result was a mild persecution—a continual spying, either in person or by means of Polly, to see what Dora was doing and keep her within range.

But on top of Mrs. Feruseth's curiosity another feel-

ing new to her was coming slowly to birth: jealousy. She had never before been jealous of one of her children, she had been too absolutely the first with Eric and Polly, shared their every thought and feeling too securely. But Dora whetted her mother's curiosity as the others never did—she wanted to know what Dora thought on everything; her opinions; her beliefs; her reasons. Unconsciously to herself, her mother was trying to see her little world through a new pair of eyes, and found it a fascinating experience once she had begun it. She belonged to that vast class of women unaccustomed to a formulation: for her, things simply *were*; —or, they were not; but Dora had a pat way of putting fleeting impressions into words that made familiar things seem different. She spoke of a large cumulus cloud as “finely upholstered,” and her mother saw and exclaimed, “Why, it does look just that way!” and at another time of the “clouds kneeling on the peak to pray to heaven.” She called the plains “stubborn and ungracious,” and next day declared they “looked like a smile and a promise.” To her, there were “mocking horizons” and a “twinkling smell of sage-brush in the breeze.”

She was full of these little significances and knew by heart quantities of poetry, and it bubbled out spontaneously when the three of them—she and her mother and Polly—were driving, as they did almost every afternoon, visiting the different parts of the huge estate to learn the lay of the land. Those were the confiding hours of their existence in which moral responsibility and the joy of life lay down together like the lion and the lamb. Her mother thrilled—she loved the lilt of verse, even when she didn't understand its meanings; and since ideas with a bead on them now cost her only the question, “What do you think—?” she indulged her-

self in the mild intoxicant until mental tipping became a habit.

But it presently meant more to her than that—in these moments of Dora's gayety and laughter, her mother saw her very self—her lost, care-free youth, the girl she had been when she came out to Wyoming, the girl who had slowly and silently passed away with marriage and maternity. Her childhood was too dim for her to see herself returned to life as Polly—Polly aroused no echoes. Dora brought back the song itself! Till then, this seeing her own image alive in her child, had been one of the secrets of maternity hidden from Mrs. Feruseth, and it burst upon her with a sense of largeness and of renewal. It was like finding flowers pressed between the pages of an old book of verse, mementos of treasured but forgotten days; flowers that instead of crumbling to dust on coming to air and light, found a brief, perfumed resurrection. And in those moments, she could hardly have told which of the two of them was her real self, she felt so one with Dora.

If this mystical experience, this sense of a reflected self, could have ended where it began—under the cloud-embossed sky, with the spell of the plains upon them calling them to forget the petty personal and drift away on the light-soaked breeze—a spiritual union might have sprung into being below their temperamental differences:—through such sympathy, Dora could have endured her mother's constant spying and probing of her silent thoughts, and would even have come to a certain pleasure in the interchange of their ideas. She was waking up to the fact that college had taught her very little of practical value, and life had taught her mother a great deal. But her mother was one of those who must live life twice before they feel they have lived it once: every word she heard had to be repeated. When

they were riding she couldn't pass a neighbor's without trotting in—"to see how they all are," she said; in reality to show off Dora—her young self, returned to life. Hardly were the greetings over when she'd give forth: "We saw a cloud just now, and Dody called it 'upholstered,' and really, it did look just like that—'upholstered'!" Then she would smile approvingly and request: "Dody, say that poem about the cloud you recited to Polly and I."

To Dora this living life twice was a horror; she mentally and morally sickened under the strain of it. She found it hard enough merely to live, deprived of conversation herself, and of the stimulus of companionship on her own level of intelligence, without this constant lowering of herself to Olaf's and Neil's level to provide them with entertainment of the sort—"making myself into crow-feed," she called it.

At first she rebelled in silence, but the day came when she rebelled openly. She and her mother and Polly were driving, and Polly demanded "that pome of Shelley's 'bout the cloud—'Away the moor is dark beneath the moon'—what comes next?—I can't remember." She was secretly trying to learn it that she might enliven the company as Dora's understudy, seeing that recitations were more appreciated than chatter.

Dora shook her head. "No more 'pomes' from this mill."

"No more, Dody? *No—more?*"

"No more, Polly."

Polly blinked in her usual way of feeling tears coming that didn't quite, the "no more" sounded so solemn and final; then she sighed: "That means y' won't, cos y' don't never change yer mind. But I would like to know why y' won't to-day so all-of-a-suddent, when y' said it yestidday soon's ever I ast y' to."

"You wouldn't understand why if I told you, my dear."

"I'd try to, ever so hard," insinuated Polly. This bringing no response, she added confidently: "We all try so hard to understand you, Dody dear, an' why y' won't when y' don't."

Dora winced even as she laughed back: "You're a very beguiling child! Well, sometimes I don't because I won't, and sometimes I don't because—I *can't*!"

A faint note of passion crept into her voice with the last word. Her mother heard the note and vaguely wondered; while Polly, feeling she was being made fun of, burst out: "Oh, don't be so mean—it spoils all our nice ride together. You *can* say, 'Away, the moor is dark'—say every last word without lookin' in the book—I wanta know why y' *won't*. Please tell me—please."

That was too much for Dora—she wouldn't spoil their nice ride more than she could help—and she explained with a touch of bitterness: "Well, then, this is why I won't from now on: because I say it once—when I *can*, but you ask me to say it over again when—I *can't*."

"Go on," urged Polly. "I'm listening, Dody. There's some more reason, I know there is—that one ain't enough."

"Perhaps not—for you, dear; but for me—it's all the reason. When we're out on the plains, or among the pines, the poems seem to spring from something that's alive in me then. But the something isn't alive in me before the ranch-hands—it's all snuffed out. I can't repeat poetry for anybody and everybody that happens along—I can't because it won't *light*! . . . It's the song, not the singer!—and all they care for is the singer. They wouldn't stay a minute to hear my choicest song if they could get a crowd of their own kind in the bunk-house to—play poker."

Polly subsided to consider a counter-stroke; but her mother flashed hers: "I had no idea you were so—*temperamental!*"

A mingled thrill of gentle malice and triumph ran over her at the pat way she had administered a rebuke with a word culled from Dora herself. How neat!

Dora pursed her lips and stared ahead, stung to the quick. To be called temperamental was to be accused of bat-winged egotism—of everything she thought unworthy of her sacred heritage.

They rode for a long time in silence after that, Dora as remote as the Hebrides. All at once her mother's self-complacence at her winged word, which she saw had shot home, changed to resentment at the silence and a dull sense of unrightful deprivation. What was this inner world of song and feeling out of which her own lost youth emerged and rejoined her, then suddenly returned to—alone? She glanced at Dora furtively, then jerked the reins; but even the quick starting of the horses didn't alter the immobility of the girl's face—that unconsciousness of pose and look of seeing a vision that so removes one from our own world. And as her mother watched it there welled up in her heart for the first time the primeval jealousy of the Great Unknown, whose call to the girl's soul seemed stronger than the only call her mother knew—love; a jealousy bitterer than we feel for death, for this is the voluntary slipping away of the loved one into a barred, mystical world without us.

"What are you thinking?" she demanded sharply; yet there was pleading in her tone could Dora have heard it.

Dora started, frowned slightly and looked away to hide it. "Just dreaming," was all she said.

CHAPTER XII

A WHITE frost fell on the 10th of August. "Winter's tryin' his hand so's to be ready to fling a blizzard over everything the first of September," said Olaf; and told of blizzards on the Fourth of July overwhelming picnickers who "had to be dug out of the drifts"; of blizzards in October that snowed the whole family in for the next six months like rabbits in a warren, the paths to the bunk-house and the corrals being canyons of snow higher than their heads, and how it took him two days to go for the mail on snow-shoes, and not another human soul went off or came on the ranch for eighteen weeks. What a prospect! Until that morning Dora hadn't given a thought to what winter at home really meant: to be snowed in—forced to live day and night inside four walls—to lose the one bit of privacy and solitude she got nearly every day by climbing up to her seat among the rocks and gazing over the plains—to be without a corner she could call her own except her little unheated cell of a bedroom!

The need of solitude had become almost a physical hunger to her—if she couldn't get it she felt she would die; and to the horrible sense of being invaded and robbed of what benefited nobody else, she added the conviction that in allowing herself to be thus robbed of her own life, she was robbing her dead father of the fruits of his lonely efforts for her and for humanity. . . . Robbed! Deprived of every last thing! If summer, with all outdoors to flee to, had been a series of difficulties and heartaches with a smouldering loathing for

the way the family herded together, what would winter be when there was no haying to take the men out, and they loafed in the kitchen from morning till night, with her mother "getting worse and worse all the time"? By "getting worse and worse," Dora meant the prying curiosity that left her no peace.

Her mother's curiosity was now directed to a definite end: she was trying to map the Great Unknown in her daughter's inner life, discover what secret interests could so distract her from home and social interests and her mother, and thus plan counter-attractions and appeals that would draw the girl down to her own level. The need of drawing her daughter down—"making her more natural" she put it—was becoming more evident to the mother all the time. It takes two to make a conversation and a quarrel, and she was finding both equally impossible with Dora—which "wasn't natural." Mrs. Feruseth's Irish Catholic temperament needed an expurgating quarrel every so often—it was the way she ridded herself of the *malaise* such natures are subject to in the intimate relations. For that reason if for no other, she was missing Eric, who had taken a job at Eric Moore's horse-camp. She and Eric could rumble along for an hour, usually over the doings of an outsider they disagreed on, giving each other tit for tat; then all in a minute they would both feel fresh and shiny and he would be kissing her—"Say, mom'—when y' goin' to make another chicken stew with dumplin's?" And when she made it—"Oh, say, mom'—this is the best one ever! What a dear old mommsie you are, anyways!"

But Dora!—not a word till she is asked: "Dody, do you like my chicken stew?"

"It's very good."

You would think the girl had swallowed a ramrod!

Why couldn't she come out with things like other folks—"I like this—I want that"—not always, "*It is*—so and so"? Her mother was growing to hate it. This viewing of life from the outside always chilled her with its aloofness; the flood of "I will, I won't, I like, I don't like" poured out by her "world" was what pulled her strings of action and kept life from stagnating for her.

Dora's continued aloofness pulled strings on her mother's inner life—piqued her curiosity, irritated while it saddened, urged her to break it down; but after weeks of ceaseless spying and probing and trying to make Dora "take an interest" in having company and going about to picnics and dances among the neighbors, all she succeeded in doing was making the girl acutely conscious of being invaded; of inner sanctuaries torn open by barbarians.

"There must be some life for me of my own!" she cried desperately. "I can't live theirs—they can't live mine, and they've got no right to force theirs on me all the time! I must have some chance to read and study what I like and work out the ranch problems—at least I must have the right to keep my thoughts to myself and some place of my own where I can think them without having my *brains picked* every minute! If I get snowed into the house with the family, I'll go crazy, and if I leave mother—I don't know what will become of her, and poor little Polly! Oh, no girl in the world ever had such a problem on her hands as I have!"

Youth loves to think its case unique. She didn't know that hers was the problem of half the civilized world of her day and generation: the breaking of the line of the woman cult. For untold ages woman had gone from her mother's home to her own home—or brought her man to her mother's home; but whichever way it happened, mother and daughter had stayed

together in the same "world," handing down and carrying on the domesticity cult with its body of activities, experience, rules, taboos, and traditions. Then within a generation the line was suddenly broken: the college woman was going from her mother's home into another "world," that fitted neither the home nor the mother. Even the architecture of the house is against a working adjustment of those two "worlds" under the same roof, for it is built for the family unit of a passing era—a unit with a close bond of interests and work, but taking little account of the individual as such, and of individual needs for a life and opportunities apart from the common interests. Educated women everywhere are striving to find outlet for their activities, something to feed developed tastes and intellect, and relief from the cramped meagreness of the old-fashioned home; and Dora's case was unusual only in her being so stripped of everything she had been accustomed to, so reduced to the naked alternatives of accepting home on its own terms and coming down to its level, submerging herself in all its petty interests, or of actively fighting to maintain her own individuality and make a life for herself the rest of the family did not share.

A life our dear ones do not share!—to undertake it open-eyed and intentionally, in cold blood as it must appear to them, costs a terrible decision even with the alternative Dora saw staring her in the face. She had to say something as well as do something—there shouldn't be any false position founded on false assumptions due to her silence; and after the way all her hints had been ignored, there was nothing for it but to bring it brutally out: "Mother, I'm wretchedly uncomfortable here in your house with everything gone to slouch and Polly so unkempt and dirty most of the time it nauseates me to have her touch me. I've got to be humanly

decent in my surroundings, or I simply can't live in them. And I'm wretchedly unhappy, too. You care nothing at all about my intellectual pursuits, and your 'Molly Bawns' and 'East Lynnes' and religious little girls named Ruby are insufferable bores to me. But I'm not playing dog in the manger to you, so you just please stop playing dog in the manger to me, and allow me to have a little life of my own that you don't share."

As Dora saw it then, that was all it was—dog in the manger on her mother's part. "And it doesn't matter what I say, or how I explain, she'll *call me that!*" thought she, "And then she'll add to it, and add and add, and there'll be a scene! . . . And I'll be made out a cold-blooded brute! . . . Oh, dear!"

Explaining her stand being too painful to consider longer just then, she turned to what she could do, and her situation resolved itself into this: If she wanted a room to work in where she could have her own things and her books about her—she had never unpacked the boxes she had brought back from college because she had nowhere to put her treasures where Polly wouldn't paw them over with her little jammy hands—a room where her right to privacy was recognized and she would be free from the constant spying and probing and the ceaseless demands for attention that made it impossible for her to put her mind on anything, she would have to build that room from the ground up. Build a House of Dreams, like Sir Launcelot's "Joyous Gard" to which she could retire from a world she didn't fit.

"Build—and be free! Why not?" she thought, and her spirits bounded. "It's so splendid to build!—to create something you can see and use!"

There were those logs her father had cut last year. Had he foreseen the contingencies bound to arise from

her home-coming and gotten them ready for her to build her House of Dreams with? She liked to think it, and did think it, and told herself that "to fail to use them now would be sheer ingratitude, besides going against his wishes." His "wishes" in the matter grew plainer to her in proportion as her picture of a snowed-in winter grew lurid. She ended by accepting them as a "command." For all that, it was so dreadful to take the final stand and say the fatal words, "I am going to build a log cabin for myself and live a life of my own," that she put it off from day to day, and it was a casual remark of her mother's that brought it out at last: "Eric has got to come home for the winter—that's all there is to it."

So far as Dora actually knew, Eric had never been near the ranch since that Sunday morning when he came—and went—though from hints dropped she suspected that he had ridden over several times at night, and her mother and Polly made frequent mysterious trips that could have no other reason than visiting Eric at the horse-camp. Beyond that, Dora knew nothing and asked nothing, and had made no move whatever in his direction—that was one problem so utterly beyond her she let it alone to work itself out. Besides which, he was fulfilling one of the conditions of the will—showing himself able to make a place in the world; and after what had happened, she didn't consider it precisely her duty to interfere. So she asked in some surprise: "Why should he come home for the winter—if he has a good job with a good man at good wages?"

"Home's the place for him," her mother evaded.

"But if he's honestly trying to show he has some stuff in him—as you told me he was—wouldn't it be just as well to let him go on and do it?"

Her mother sniffed indignantly. She found Dora's

blindness at times quite as irritating as her sharp insights and criticisms.

"Stuff—the boy has plenty of stuff in him, without showin' it that way," she retorted. "Drinkin' and gamblin' with that crowd and hangin' round down to Rohmer's ranch! A boy his age under the influence of a woman like Addie! He says there's nothing in it—he just likes her, and she's jolly and friendly with all that outfit. But if there ain't anything in it for him, there is for her. I see it if he don't—I know her breed. She's bound to marry him, boy as he is, and her eight or ten years older. I can't sleep nights thinkin' of it—the idea of him bringin' such a woman as her into the family makes the cold sweat come out all over me. Why, your father would fairly turn in his grave if he knew it. Eric will come home for the winter, and stay home if his mother has any influence over him left!"

That settled the log cabin without further agonies of soul. Dora braced herself and said: "I'm going to build myself a study at the end of the L. It will mean a door through at the end of the hall—I hope you won't mind that."

"You're going to build—a study!" Her mother's thoughts and feelings were all confusion in a moment. What did this mean? More going off? And just as Eric was coming home? Had Dora no love for any of her family? Was this a new departure into the Great Unknown? But before her mother had succeeded in putting anything into words another feeling surged up and said: "James, to the very life!"

And a curious thing had happened to Dora—while she stood there braced, yet recoiling from the coming scene, she felt herself suddenly overshadowed as it were by her father's spirit, commanding her in a sort of wordless fiat: "Will! Build! Create! Only thus is

man raised above the level of the brutes—by his will to create life for himself!” As this came to her, something in her inmost depths seemed to solidify—an unarguable determination to *do that thing*, from which she no more than her mother might escape.

It was her mother who spoke first: “There’s no reason why you shouldn’t build all you want to, as I can see. But I must go get dinner.”

CHAPTER XIII

OLAF's awakening of heart had been large and sincere, and though Dora treated him with more coolness than he had expected when he constituted himself her champion, he still flattered himself that she treated him very differently from the other two men, and looked upon him as the responsible manager of the ranch whom she couldn't and wouldn't get along without; therefore he answered in tones both willing and certain: "*Sure*, I can git that there cabin up fer y' in time fer winter—I can git her up inside a week if y'll leave me send fer my brother Frank an' git Elmer Slothower fer to do the fine carpenter work. Them logs'll be more'n plenty, an' they's boards, too, fer the floorin' an' roofin' up there to the shed. All we gotta git is winder-sashes an' a door, an' the stones for the fireplace an' chimbley. Neil an' Freddie Woodhull, why they might go out after 'em to-day to that there ridge—y' see out there on th' plains?—they's all flat stones, natural broke. Most o' the old pioneers used 'em before they had no brick. I can git brick to Laramie—it's a lot tastier than stone, an' if it was me doin' it, I druther wait till I could git brick—an' tiles fer the mantel——"

"Oh, no! I want stone—it's more in keeping. I want my cabin to look 'pioneer'—rough and substantial—made out of what comes to hand in the land on which it grows!"

Olaf shrugged; brick was the thing, but, of course, if a pretty girl wanted her way, why, leave her have her way—"so long as she's payin' fer it." But what a chance

to prove himself the capable man—the friend! It was: “All right, Miss Feruseth—I understand! . . . Yes, Miss Feruseth, I’ll have it done jest’s you say. . . . Sure, Miss Feruseth, I’ll ’tend to it—you don’t need fer to give it another thought,” and he went on the jump and kept the other men on the jump, and—presto! change!—in a week her cabin was up and done! An exceedingly simple affair, of course, as it had to be; sixteen by eighteen, with a large open fireplace, two windows to the south for the sun, and another to the west, and a double shelf running all the way round inside for her books; that was about all there was to it to start with. The door opened at right angles to the door they had cut through at the end of the hall, and she had them make a little glassed-in porch with another door. “Connected and disconnected,” she said. “With it, but not of it. I can reach my study from all outdoors.”

She went to Laramie for a black mission table, a Morris chair and a deep rocker; put a box divan in one corner and a dull-brown rug on the floor, and ordered a double student-lamp. The peeled logs, which she had left as they were, gave a soft yellow tone to the walls. Olaf demurred at this, and begged her feelingly to allow him to lath and plaster and put on a wall-paper, either pink or blue—or both combined: blue ground and pink roses: he was growing sentimental as he worked at this little home for her. But she refused to hear of it; repeated: “I want it all ‘pioneer’—any kind of paper would spoil the effect—it would swear at the fireplace.” Claret rep window hangings, and the dozen assorted pillows and cushions she had brought from college saved the room from sombreness. Besides the books, however, there were few decorations—two or three colored prints, one a seascape, several etchings, half a dozen portraits of celebrities, and Whistler’s “Mother”; and ex-

cept for some vases, none of them expensive, and two of them plain glass in which she had always kept flowers, there was no bric-à-brac; and she didn't want any, though she found it difficult to refuse her mother's offering of a hideous clock from Denver whose case was a jargon of ore samples of Colorado mines, and Polly's generous contribution of her dearest treasure—that bisque girl toothpick-holder with a basket on her back, if anything, to Dora's eyes, more hideous than the clock. Polly did it up in mussy pink tissue and returned it to its box with great reluctance, murmuring wistfully: "It wouldda looked so sweet there on the shelf, an' y' couldda put flowers in 's well as toothpicks if y' didn't want toothpicks"—this in reply to Dora's chief reason for rejecting it as unsuitable—"fer y' don't *hafta* put in it what y' don't need in here. . . . An' y' could put—*matches*!"

This last inspiration winning only a short "Thank you, dear, but I have a match-holder that I like better, and that goes with my other little fixings," Polly tried another line: "I'd like to see it there with all yer other fixin's when I come, fer I shall spend half my time in here with you, an' the other half at home with mamma!"

"Oh, no you won't!" Dora told her with joking firmness; now that she had a place she could call her own she intended it to be understood that she had her own rules and regulations for such intrusions. "The very first thing you learn that you never, never come in here unless you're invited. This is my workroom."

"But you'll invite me whenever I want—'cos you're my own dear sister," insinuated Polly. "An', besides—I'm helpin' y' run the ranch—I 'splain lots an' lots o' things y' don't understand. I can help now—I can pull those wrapping-papers off'n yer books quicker'n you, an' put 'em where y' want 'em."

Dora was unpacking her books and standing them on the shelf.

"Are your hands clean?"

"They're water clean, but not soap clean," confessed Polly, "but they'll be soap clean in half a minute if y'll wait." She whisked out and whisked back, her mother, in her wake, exclaiming: "Why, Dody! How wonderful! You got it finished in no time!" Such constructive aptitude seemed miraculous to Mrs. Feruseth: it would have taken her literally years to arrive at these results, and it was just ten days since Dora had announced her intention of building, and here the thing was done, furnished, and habitable! Mrs. Feruseth looked about at the prints; Polly looked at her; and all at once something large and magical seemed to envelop her—it had needed her mother to touch it off—a world utterly remote, yet somehow hers because it was her mother's. Just then her mother's eye lighted on the portrait of Whistler's "Mother." "Why, how that reminds me of my dear old grandmother!" she exclaimed. "*She* wore a cap just like that! And how many times I've helped her clap starch into her caps!"

Though she was already dressed to go out and the horses were at the door—she had chosen this day to slip off to see Eric, thinking Dora would be too busy unpacking to notice her absence—she sat down and rocked and rocked, slowly letting her eyes wander from one object to another, and always bringing them back alight to her two darlings, Polly, open-mouthed, silent, blissful; Dora, putting finishing touches here and there in a deft, experienced way, and every so often appealing to her: "How do you like that, mother? Doesn't this look better?"

"It looks lovely any way you put it," agreed her mother, regarding her fondly. "Everything you do is

all right—you got so much more taste than I have about these things.”

“I’m glad you like it,” said Dora cordially; and after a considerable pause in which she had rearranged a row of books, she repeated: “I’m glad you like it—I hoped you would,” to cover up the thoughts she had just been saying to herself while her back was turned: “Mother or no mother, there’s always some way out if you’re willing to work for it and refuse to lower yourself to other people’s standards; you *can* live your own life—you can build your own house of dreams—if you only make up your mind that you *will*, do or die—*will*—and let nothing turn you from your purpose. Determination—that’s what counts—that’s what conquers; determination to keep your own ideals. Everything goes down before it—as you see!”

And in her mother’s fond, delighted smile, she thought she saw! For her mother sat there rocking and rocking, as placidly as if the place had belonged to her for forty years. She, too, felt the magic in the atmosphere—a wider, more iridescent world seemed to rest its wings within, bringing back memories of a life once lived and long forgotten—home, Ireland. Nothing was similar to what she had had as a girl, yet everything was subtly, swiftly suggestive of leisure, affluence, social consideration; and all these long years, hidden and snowed under by the pleasures and cares of marriage, maternity, ranch life, the thought had lurked and gnawed that out in Wyoming she was, socially, *nobody*. If Dora in person had brought back her mother’s lost girlhood, Dora’s room now brought back her mother’s lost social past. As she sat there rocking, she felt herself rehabilitated—now the neighbors would know what she had been—at home in Ireland! She might have married poorer there, but she would have been a lady! And Eric—how

he would enjoy this! Now he would be glad to stay home—there would be no more hanging about Addie Rohmer. Here the family would all be together at last—sit around the fire and pop corn and roast chestnuts; Eric would lie on the divan while Polly and Dora fed him home-made dainties; and the ranch-hands would *not* be there. All at once the men became repugnant to her—she was so much back in Ireland in her father's home she wondered how she had ever stood them loafing about the kitchen. They could have the kitchen to themselves after this—they were no part of her picture of a smiling mother surrounded by smiling children, hanging on her love. Eric home! . . . She came out of her dream with a start—Eric must be brought home at once, and the horses were waiting at the door, and the nut cake she had been all the morning making for him as a peace-offering and inducement was waiting on the kitchen table. She rose quickly and began pulling on her driving-gloves, asking: "What day will you give the housewarming and have all the neighbors in to see this? I could invite some now, as I drive past. I thought about next Wednesday."

Dora wheeled on her from the little afternoon tea-table she was setting out. "Have the neighbors in to see—this? Why, mother! Do you think I want this copied—caricatured—all over the State?—to say nothing of having people paw over all my things!"

"Copied? I don't know what higher compliment folks could pay you, I'm sure," returned her mother, feeling hurt. "And as for seein' what you done here—after you've roused everybody's cur'osity, you're bound to gratify it. What will folks think if you don't?"

Dora was almost choking with wrath, and fairly barked: "I don't care what they think, as I've said twenty times already, and I have no intention of grati-

fyng anybody's curiosity. This is *my* study—I built it for *my*-self, not for a county showroom; and I never dreamed of lettng anybody outside the family see it."

"I don't know how you'll help it and be humanly decent—when folks comes miles and miles to see a thing—and they will do just that," was her mother's comment. "They can't be turned away like cattle."

"When folks come *on my invitation*, they won't be turned away."

Her mother eyed her dubiously and began to flush. "You mean you expect folks—anybody and everybody, no matter who—only to come in here on your invitation, and stay out till they get one?"

"I mean I built it for myself—as I always said," Dora evaded, trying to avoid the drift she saw in her mother's question. But she was not to get off so easily; her mother flung back: "You mean to say that even your mother and Polly and Eric are expected to wait your invitation before they venture to come in here?"

Both were too much taken by surprise by this crashing of dreams to see quite where they were going now. Dora had supposed she had made her position brutally clear already in her various remarks since the day the foundation was laid; but apparently all her statements and hints had gone over her mother's head. What was her mother made of that she couldn't *see* that this place had been created to keep the neighbors, and all the rest, *out*? Her mother stood there seething inside—this was the worst yet from a returned college girl: to be first restricted in everything in the management of her own child, and now *excluded* from her house and home! Dora got her words in first. "I should think," said she slowly, "that any one who loved me would consider my feelings in the matter and not wish to intrude on me here when it may not be convenient for

me. . . . And I am very sure that no one, with the delicacy I know you to have, will do so without—something at least resembling an invitation.” She was pale and looked down at the rug as she said it. She hated to wound her mother, but since she hadn’t understood, it was now or never to make her understand, unless she were to be allowed to appropriate the study as a family sitting-room and public show-place.

Mrs. Feruseth’s seething boiled over in wrath. “Such selfishness—such cruelty—I could not have believed!” she cried. “To think that I have to stand here at my age and have a child of mine that I bore in pain and sorrow tell me that I’m to be excluded from the only decent and comfortable room in my house—not wanted by my own child that I nursed at my breast! . . . Come, Polly—” and still tugging mechanically at her gloves, she hurried Polly out of the room, out of the house and into the carriage and drove off, leaving Eric’s nut cake on the table.

How long Dora stood there petrified she never remembered. The fruit of all her effort, her dashing determination, her struggles to hold fast to a corner of her own world in which she could continue to grow her own life and nature, had been plucked by the hand of an alien at the very instant it ripened: the study was no longer hers: in those few bitter words of pique and disappointment, her mother in some intangible way both claimed and possessed it—she *couldn’t* be excluded and driven out by the child she had borne in pain and sorrow and nursed at her breast! For to natures like Dora’s, those sentimental claims and obligations are more binding than legal documents. Her mother must be allowed to come and go as she pleased—yes, invited to do so; which meant, of course, Polly and Eric and all the neigh-

bors. Which meant, if anything, one shade worse than things had been all along, for now all Dora's little treasures and mementos were spread out to be criticised, enumerated, inquired about, pawed and clawed. She was brought out of her reverie by hearing Olaf through the doors her mother had purposely left gaping behind her, clump into the kitchen and throw an armful of wood into the box; then his steps approached. Perhaps he, too, was ready with an excuse to come in and make himself at home! He was only going to the commissary to forage for a slab of cake, but his approach along the hall was enough—Dora snatched up her hat and fled the house.

Out on her rock seat overlooking the plains, the "twinkling smell of the sage-brush" came on a gentle breeze; round-hulled clouds drifted lazily in a blue-sea sky, sailing eastward, ever eastward to the land of her heart's desire; on one of the nearer ranges a bunch of seven antelope grazed with the cattle, the white chrysanthemums on their rumps singling them out in the sun; the Peak had already donned its afternoon deep purple—at sunrise it would be pink. She never came up there without a tingling reverberation of that night vision of the silver enchantment, and of her father's words: "I lost God on the plains." Utter silence now spread over everything—limitless miles of tranquil serenity on every side, in the midst of which was one tiny, tiny speck beating with wounded determination and disappointment—her own heart! What a strange thought!—in the landscape stretched around her, she herself was but a speck, smaller even than the horses she could barely discern afar, and only because they moved. Her heart moved—and ached. Could God in his distant heaven discern her heart?—distinguish it from the pebbles, the motes of dust flittering in the

sunlight? A thing so small, so insignificant, and yet—so full of pain!

She felt like a candle blown out by the wind, all warmth and light of living gone from her; but as she looked out over the range at the Peak, her father's spirit seemed to loom up before her mental vision—sober, steadfast, tragic, solitary, rising serene above the rest, a soul unaccompanied like her own, unheralded, unchronicled; he had sought his home of dreams alone on the ranges with his sheep—and lost God. Never had she felt so keenly that she wanted to find God as a personal friend, tell him her ache and ask him what to do. Never had it come home to her so forcibly that the natural man is not the whole man—the spiritual man ever called from within to a power above and beyond himself. But where, in all this vast solitude, in the midst of which she was but a speck of conscious dust, was there an eye to see, or an ear to hear her plaint? Yet even as she shrank to nothingness before that thought, the thought of her father's simple, unaffected morality, so unostentatiously lived amidst just these surroundings, expanded her soul again to human needs and problems. She might be only a speck of dust, but she lived and was conscious! The speck of dust enjoyed and suffered—it had its claims and its rights! She felt she asked so little now of life, when all was said and done—only to keep this room to herself; and an hour or so in the evening to herself; and against that small gain, she was setting all she had planned to be and do in the great world; *and her youth!* For she must give this ranch and these people more than six years of her best before she was free to divide the property if she found it impossible to carry out her father's scheme.

She sat so still pondering that a huge coyote going to water at the river scrambled up her rocks, and was

almost at her feet before he saw her. They stared into each other's eyes, daring each other to move first until he could dare her no longer; then stealthily, step by step, but never taking his eyes from her, he picked his way backward like a shadow until he melted into the sage-brush and disappeared. She laughed aloud, he was so funny in his timidity, when with a single bold dash he could have put her to rout; yet guessing what he was after, she felt sorry for him. "Poor fellow," she thought, "he'll go thirsty a long time before he dares go to the river again—like me!"

"Go thirsty a long time"—just what in those words suggested her mother and applied them to her, it would be hard to say; but in sudden vision, her mother appeared—*thirsting*—thirsting for refined, beautiful things in her home, soft subdued colors, pictures appealing to the imagination, surroundings that didn't clash, but harmonized among themselves and with the life of the place; little feminine fixings that make a room home-like and cosey; a place to herself and her children that wasn't overrun day and night by ranch-hands, their boots endlessly tracking in dirt of every description to be endlessly swept out again—that was what she was thirsting for!

Dora saw it. Up to that moment she had always assumed, out of her own sturdy effectiveness and her inexperience with family life, that when people had the money and still lacked nice things, it was because they lacked the desire for nice things. She had been sitting there telling herself: "Mother had the means—she could have had everything *if she had wanted it!* She didn't want a room like mine—she doesn't want it now—she only doesn't want me to have it all to myself!" Then quite suddenly she realized that what her mother lacked wasn't the desire, but the *creative aptitude*, and the time

to work out anything for herself. She couldn't design, assemble articles according to a plan; execute; she could only take what came to hand and make the best of it; and even if she had the idea, she hadn't self-interest enough to carry it out. From the hour when she had conceived her first-born, maternalism had absorbed all her creative fires, all the driving forces of her soul, and there had been nothing left over to design and build a beautiful home with! And then, all in a minute, without her lifting a finger, she had found her house of dreams ready made, out one door and in at the other, just as she'd wanted it, even to her grandmother's picture on the mantel! *That* was what the new study meant to her; and what it meant to be excluded.

"Poor, dear mother!" thought Dora with painful contrition. "It meant so much to her, and I didn't see it when I spoke. Oh, what a selfish brute I am—wanting to keep it all to myself, and she a widow! I ought to be glad she wanted it—glad I could do that for her, after all her years of deprivation! . . . And I *am* glad—I am—I am! I won't be selfish with the mother who bore me in pain and sorrow. She and Polly may have my room—I'll build a cabin up here on the ridge and leave her my study for a sitting-room. There's still a way out—I'll find it somehow without being a selfish brute to my own mother!"

She watched the sun slipping with a splash of glory into the west, her spirit serene, uplifted—selfishness was slain. It might be months—a year—before the logs and boards and everything could be gotten together for a new cabin, but what matter? She would manage somehow to get through the winter alive; her mother would be happy and could give her housewarming next week. Happy at last, one might say, for that was what had ailed her all the time—why she had been so often

sulky and snappish: she had been thirsting for beautiful things and a place of her own. Dora was happy herself, then, thinking about it. In her hopeful inexperience she didn't know that in such natures as her mother's, clinging like a swift-leaved, smothering vine to every human being she called her own, once the wire tendrils have woven into an intimate relationship, they can be loosed of their hold only by tearing a piece of one's living self away—the self that is pitiful of another's sufferings and feels remorse. There is no other way to lasting inward peace.

But for the moment, peace had laid hands on Dora's heart—one of her nagging problems had solved itself for her: she had found a way to make her mother really happy and contented; and with the shine of self-sacrifice in her eyes, and the vitality of a fresh inspiration pink-ing her cheeks, she greeted her on her return.

"You were right, mother! I was selfish and horrid about my room——"

Her mother interrupted hastily: "Now, Dody dear, don't say anything more about that—and *don't* take every little thing so to heart—life's too short for us to be quarrellin' over trifles neither one of us meant. How pretty you're lookin'!—your cheeks red—your eyes laughin'—your feet dancin' over the meadow to meet me! It made my heart jump when I saw you comin'—it's how I danced to meet my mother when I was a girl."

She was smiling—a sort of reflex smile from her frown at Eric with whom she had just been through the worst scene in their lives. She had returned to Dora as to a port in a storm: there must be nothing unpleasant between *them*, not if she could help it by amiability and concessions.

Dora was taken aback both by the compliment,

coming as it did, and by her mother's change of front to smiles: she had expected a period of sulks; but she rushed on with her offering, determined to let there be no mistake as to her own change of heart: "Oh, mother, I was mean and selfish—a horrid little pig to you! And you may have my room—you and Polly—all for your own. I'll move my books out to-morrow and then you can ask all the neighbors you want—have your housewarming next week and I'll help."

Mrs. Feruseth was so startled she could only ejaculate, "Why, Dody!" and when Dora answered, "You may have it for yours," she repeated, but in a different tone, "Why, Dody! Have it for *mine*? Why, Dody—what does that mean? Have you give up your work you was plannin' to do there—write a book, or finish your father's that he left in his desk, or whatever it was you been hintin' about all summer? Have you give it up this way, between dinner and supper?"

"Oh, no! Of course I've not given up my work—only that new room—to you and Polly."

Her mother at first looked puzzled. Knowing both the girl and her father as she did, this sudden change of front, "between dinner and supper," as she said, was the last thing in the world she had expected. Then immediately it alarmed her; there must be something back of it, ready to jump out and pounce on her.

"But I don't understand what's all this about givin' up your pretty new room to Polly and I soon's ever you got it all fixed an' finished for yourself," she began warily, watching Dora for any sign she might unwittingly betray, "and goin' on with your work at the same time. You can't work in your bedroom—it's too freezin' cold, or 'twill be in a few weeks from now, and you can't work in the kitchen with the men comin' in all the time to spy and pester you. You're

fairly a plate o' molasses to flies to the three of 'em—I never see anything like it, the way they seem to know if you set down in here one minute to talk to me and come trompin' in for a drink o' water just to look at you! And the sittin'-room's too public—too like a hall—too cold in winter, and it ain't fixed up anyway to suit a scholar just back from college. And surely you ain't meanin' to put off beginnin' to write your book till you've forgot all you've learnt! I wasn't out here two years before it seemed to me I'd forgot almost how to read."

With a smile that was just a trifle wry at the way her mother stole her thunder, now it suited her to, Dora answered: "No, I'm not giving up my idea of doing something a little later; it's only that I didn't know when I began it that you would like my study so much, or that you had always been wanting a cosey little room just for your own. So you take it—I'm glad I could do it for you after all you did and suffered for me—and I'll be happy thinking how much you and Polly enjoy having it."

Her mother warmed and thrilled at this little scrap of appreciation of what she had done, but she was even more alarmed than before. There is always something ominous in the easy and generous renunciation of what was once prized and striven for. "But what are you going to do now?" she faltered. "Where will you work—where will you go after winter sets in, when you want to be by yourself free of interruptions?"

"Oh, I'll fix that somehow—I'll build another cabin out on the ridge when the men are able to get the logs for it."

"Build — another — cabin — half a mile — away — from—me!" she gasped. "Build one so far up among the rocks I can't even get to it!" In the midst of her

dismay at this revelation, and of her wounded feelings, there came another surge of jealousy at the Great Unknown, more poignant than she had ever felt because of her glimpse into what Dora's little world really held. Her mother "saw through" that easy renunciation now!—Dora would betake herself out of the house entirely—set up for herself—have her own college friends out with her—drop her own family and go her way! Well, she shouldn't!

Her mother flung herself upon her, kissing and hugging her, pouring out a river of self-reproaches: "Oh, Dody, Dody, my darlin', how could you think I'd take your pretty room away from you, after you workin' so hard to make it for yourself? How could I have been so selfish as to say what I did? It's my fault—all mine—it's my Irish temper—you mustn't mind your poor old mother—she does the best she knows, and only wants to see her children happy! Why, what would the room be without you in it? It wasn't the room I cared for, no matter how pretty you made it—it was bein' with you, and now you talk of leavin' me here all alone!—after all these years of waitin' for you! . . .

"Oh, Dody, don't leave me—don't leave your mother, darlin'. I'm so worried about Eric and that woman—so worried about everything. I got nobody in the world to lean on, now your father's gone, but you—nobody I can always trust to do what's right—nobody I can take comfort in and advise with when I'm troubled. I'll do anything you say—come when you ask, or stay away till you ask—I won't bother you in your work when you want to be by yourself, or allow Polly to—anything! Only don't leave me—don't leave me here in this house all alone! Promise me you won't leave me—promise me, Dody darlin'," and she put her head down, sobbing on Dora's shoulder.

The girl was more overcome than she had been by any previous scene; touched to the quick by her mother's willingness to see her side of the case and accede at last, and deceived by it. She whispered: "Don't cry! I promise I'll not leave you."

And with those words, spoken on impulse and without thought of future consequences, her mother felt the girl had bound herself irrevocably for life. There would never be any going back on it—a promise was sacred to a Feruseth, even though it were made in the dark and spelled "slavery," when shown in the light. Mrs. Feruseth didn't see it then as slavery—she saw it only as peace and security, her complete right to her daughter and everything she owned, every step she took that might be made to seem "leaving"; and all gained by a heartfelt appeal and tears. She dried her tears and set about getting supper, feeling that a new life had begun for her that day.

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. FERUETH, like many other emotionally unrestrained, yet kindly disposed and generous people, couldn't fall out with one person and not immediately strive to fall in with another, particularly if she had had a recent tiff with that other. She could be "at outs" with one of her children, and only sulk or bear a mild sort of temporary grudge that she knew would be gone by morning or evaporate in a kiss; but she couldn't be at outs with both her grown children, Dora and Eric, at one and the same time, and not feel self-convicted of wrong on her side; the concentrated "hard feelings" derived from two overwhelmed her. In fact, "hard feelings" and severity were so contrary to her nature that in order to maintain them at all against one of her children for an hour, she needed the moral support and affection of the others, or she wilted. That was what brought her smiling home to Dora after their little tiff about the privacy of the study: her mother was for the first time in her life seriously at outs with Eric—she was actually down on him and he knew it. It was a new experience for both of them. She had been cross at him often enough, piqued and hurt, upset and anxious, and they had quarrelled in their way; but she had always been ready to forgive at a word and forget all about it, and go on making allowances and excusing him to others as if nothing had happened to mar her confidence and happiness in him. As, indeed, it hadn't: her confidence and happiness in him were grounded in deeper layers of her being than could be touched and

rumpled by their little spats; she understood him too well to take him as seriously inwardly as she was outwardly pretending to; and she was too thoroughly blinded by her loving ambition for him to see anything but his rosy future "when he got over the loose-knit stage." That last had for some time been a satisfactory explanation for anything and everything; then it all in an hour failed, and— "There was *no* excuse for him—not a particle! He ought to be ashamed of himself for everything he did—ashamed! Nobody ever heard of a boy acting so—it was disgraceful! He ought to be ashamed, for there was *no* excuse for it."

The first thing of all to upset her was that she had found him at Rolmer's ranch, hanging around Addie. Polly had warned her mother to turn in as they were passing and see if he were there; and he was there, instead of two miles farther on at his horse-camp, and under the influence of liquor besides. "There was *no* excuse for that—not a particle," thought she, though she had seen him thus many times at home and had found excuses then.

For the second thing, he was cross at her from the very minute she arrived; for hardly had he called out, "H'lo, mom'," when he demanded, "Where's my nut cake at?" without even stopping to kiss her; and when she tried to explain, and get a little sympathy for how she had forgotten it, after working on it nearly the whole morning, picking the nuts out with her own fingers because Polly was in helping Dora unpack—all the sympathy she got was: "Huh! Left it on the kitchen-table an' come away without it when y' promised to bring it to-day an' I was countin' on it, sure! Damn mean shame! Much you an' Polly care fer *me*."

His mother saw through *that*!—he had counted on her beautiful white-frosted nut cake for *Addie*! Well, *she*

didn't get it—that was one consolation! Addie just then came bumbling out with a diminutive blind kitten whose squeak was much too large for it, and laid the object in Polly's hand, to her great joy. Mrs. Feruseth greeted Addie pleasantly as befitted a neighbor, while regarding her, as it were, through the shadowy image of her own Dora and thinking: "What a difference! Bold hussy! Common as dirt—coarse as horse-tail! But what can my boy see in her?" At that moment she detected a look of understanding like a preconcerted signal passing between them, and Addie immediately took herself off with a swish of skirts and the excuse that she "smelt her bread burning in the oven."

"I'd like to see the bread *she* bakes!" thought Mrs. Feruseth going into the front room, that, instead of the kitchen, being pointed out by Eric, who followed, still grumbling about his nut cake. And then the next thing came out—he had thrown up his job as horse-wrangler—the job that was to prove he could make his place in the world—and was eating, drinking, and sleeping at the Rohmers'; in other words, living there instead of at home where he belonged, and all the reason he gave when asked the "cause of such foolishness," was: "Got tired an' quit—that's why, an' why enough."

His mother said nothing—she was too disgusted, and she perfectly well saw the real reason—Addie Rohmer. Eric fidgeted and then explained that there was "no fun at the horse-camp since Posey Burnham had gone off to Idaho buying horses on his own account—good time o' year fer to git left-over stock cheap so's it wouldn't hafta be wintered—lots o' money in it if y' knew how—Posey, he knew how," and wanted him to go along. "But I didn't want to go so fur away from home," Eric concluded in a virtuous tone that gave his mother a brief comfort while she thought, "He wouldn't leave

me—that's something,"—a comfort that turned acrid a moment later when he steamed off: "No, sir—I wouldn't go even to Laramie—Addie, she advised me to stay here, Johnny-on-the-spot, and look after muh *rights*, an' you bet it's what I'm goin' to do!"

"You choose a queer way to do it I must say—livin' over here to Rohmers' instead of comin' home," she observed with sarcasm.

"Home!" he blazed. "What's home to me now, I'd like to know—when *she* gits everything to do as she pleases with, an' me nothin'?" He referred to Dora as "she" because he had made up his mind never to let her name pass his lips till he had his "rights"—it was how he punished her: he "didn't know her." "Why, she's even built a whole new house on there fer herself! Huh! Home indeed! Home's no place fer me, not after—everything!"

"Well, it's your own fault," his mother retorted pettishly. "You got just as much rights in my house as she has—no less, no more. If you'd wanted to build a study onto the house same as her, you could of done it and welcome, as you ought to know. Nobody'd of said you nay, she least of all—if that's what you're grouchin' over. *I'm* the one has the say of the house, and what's built and what isn't—it's mine for life under the will, and you could of fixed up there to suit yourself if you'd said the word, or lifted a finger to do it. So you don't need to bring up what *she* done with my permission to suit *herself*—she had a perfect right to, and I'm glad she done it if it makes her happier. If you don't choose to stay home with your own mother—if you care more for this outfit"—she indicated Addie and the family with a scornful gesture in the direction of the kitchen—"you needn't come whining to me for sympathy, that's all!"

"With muh mother—yes—stay home with you fast enough," he mumbled hastily, considerably taken aback by her outburst, and added in a bitter tone: "It ain't you—it's *her* that keeps me away. My God—think of it! Me a man to be bossed by a girl I don't hardly know by sight!—bossed by secret directions, too, that ain't in the will! Has she told y' yet what's in the letter?"

Here his mother took fire. "Are you never goin' to stop harpin' on that letter?" she demanded angrily. "I'm sick and tired of the very word. Every time I come to see you, it's 'Has she showed you the letter—has she told you what's in the letter?' till I declare I'm beginning to think you're losin' your mind! Such pesterin' I never in my life had to put up with from one of my children. . . . No, she hasn't, and what's more she never will, so that's all there is to that, and you might as well give up pesterin' me and yourself first as last, and make the best of things as they are."

She had long since ceased to care what was in the letter; and through sheer indolence, if nothing else, she would have forgotten her pique and everything unpleasant connected with Dora's refusal to show it if Eric hadn't incessantly harped on both. Knowing what was in that letter had become almost a mania with him. In her brief, clandestine visits, his mother had felt under some sort of intangible obligation to sympathize with him' about it; but she had suddenly come to the end of that rope—she couldn't, and what was more, she wouldn't—too much had happened since she had seen him last; and under the influence of the new study, of her social rehabilitation, and of somebody who treated her "like a lady," *his* treatment of her was more than she felt called on to stand from anybody. Sympathy, indeed! He ought to be ashamed of himself! She told

him so right out, and added that he ought to have "respect enough for her gray hairs, if he hadn't for the mother that bore him in pain and sorrow, to treat her like a lady," which drew from him another burst of bitterness: "So even you've turned against me same as everybody else since *she* come home! I can't go any place but what I hear it, er something that shows it—it's all *her*, an' what's she doin', and why don't *I* do this er that? All the fellas sayin', 'Gosh, if I had a sister like her, I'd stay home an' git the good of her takin' her to dances. Eric, why don't y' fetch her round? Tryin' to hog the prettiest bunch o' calicoes in the State? You can't marry her—give another chap a chancet.' Er it's, 'Gosh, if I had a sister like that, I'd make her darn muh socks.' . . . 'Gosh, if I had a sister like that, you bet I'd not leave her keep a perfec'ly good college eddication shut up in a bone box—I'd make her give me some—if I needed it bad as some folks I know.' That's how it is every place I go—how it was all the time at the horse-camp, till I got sick an' quit. Y'd think she's the only girl in the State—and she muh *guardeen*! What a position fer a man to be in!"

"You ain't a man in the eyes of the law," his mother corrected bluntly.

"The hell, if I ain't!"

The expression pained her deeply—profanity in her presence was almost the last remnant of her Old World repugnances, and she had brought Eric up to "respect her and treat her like a lady" to that extent at least; or thought she had—until now. In her moment of silence while she considered how to reprove him, he managed to get in: "The hell, if I ain't a man! An' *her*—with secret directions from papa rulin' *me*!"

"She's done no ruling at all, far as that goes, for you ain't been home," snapped his mother.

"I guess she ain't! I settled *her*—an' I'll give her no chancet to rule me—unless she comes after me with the law;—and then she won't git me!"

"Then don't complain of what she's done or what she's got—she's my child same as you are, and got the same right to enjoy herself in my home as any other child has; and if you don't love your mother, after all I've done for you, enough to stay home, sister or no sister, letter or no letter, will or no will, and try to make me happy in my old age the same as the girls does, then all I've got to say to you is—the *ingratitude of sons!*—the cruel—the *wicked ingratitude* of the sons that should be the stay of mothers in their old age! And to think that I should have lived to see it!"

She rose as she delivered this, and he with her, sorry for her, but more furious than ever at Dora; he'd get even with her no matter what his mother said. He turned to Polly: "Where does she keep that letter hid?"

"In the front of her waist. She's kep' it there since the first day," Polly communicated artlessly, before her mother could stop her, and kissed the kitten on the end of its nose.

"Well, then, can't you sneak it away from her?"

"Oh, no—I couldn't do a thing like that to Dody—she's my sister!"

"Then you don't love your brother more'n anybody else the way you always pretend to, that's all."

"Yes, I do."

"Then, you git me that letter to prove it!"

"I can't, I tell you! She wouldn't like me if she found out."

"Fraidy-cat—that's what you are!"

"I ain't!"

"Fraidy-cat! Fraidy-cat! Ssss!"

"I ain't! An' you're horrid an' mean—mean to mamma—mean to Dody—mean to everybody!"

His mother was so angry she fairly choked on her words: "How can you speak so to her, Eric Feruseth—you pretendin' to be a *man*, and puttin' a child up to do what you know ain't right—steal a letter; and from your own sister? You ought to be ashamed of yourself! . . . Come, Polly—take the kitten back to Addie, and be quick about it; we must go. Run, now!"

As Polly scudded out of hearing, her mother turned on him with a broadside: "Yes, you ought to be ashamed of yourself—I'm ashamed of you. And to think I should ever have lived to see this day!—You intoxicated—tempting a child to sin—treating your mother like the dirt beneath your feet! And you—calling yourself—a *man*! Well, you've opened my eyes at last—you've shown me my place in your affections and respect. I'm through with excuses for you—through. If you don't care enough about seeing your mother to come home and see her properly, you'll go without seeing her—I'm not to be dragged about over the country—a woman of my age and position—and into horse-camps and holes like Rohmer's ranch—a place your dear dead father wouldn't step foot in!—to see a son whose only gratitude is to insult me and my daughters! I'm ashamed of you, Eric Feruseth, disgrace to the name your father nobly bore untarnished for a lifetime in the country where you're makin' it a mocking and a by-word; but have a care that I don't rue the day I bore you!"

Her last words rang in his ears as ominously as a curse; he was frightened at the mysterious menace of her tone and look. Did she mean she was through with—*him*—throwing him over? He was silenced, sobered, and awkwardly watched her climb into the buggy be-

side Polly and drive away without a word of good-by on either side.

Hardly were they out of ear-shot when Polly communicated: "I s'pose I *love* Eric much as ever, but I don't *like* him a bit—he's nasty an' smelly, 'sides bein' mean as a badger an' cross as two sticks," for which her mother, thinking almost the identical words, reproved her, "You mustn't say things like that about your own brother," and felt her conscience relieved by the reproof and her indignation supported and justified by Polly's opinion.

Put in a nutshell, his mother had rushed to him for salve for bruises received from Dora and had found him a mustard plaster; and of the two, she now greatly preferred the bruises. Eric played on just one string in her harp—affection; he never aroused all her slumbering resentments and primitive instincts as Dora did; largely because, having no particular ideal of a mother, his mother never felt herself falling below it; or being criticised and restricted. What she was without effort suited him entirely, and what he was suited her—a comfortable relationship on both sides. She filled the gaps in it by making allowances. Now she couldn't and wouldn't make any more allowances—she was through with them as she had told him. She wanted a son she didn't have to make allowances for—"it was time he began to show himself a man like his father," she reiterated over and over, "high time, if he's ever going to amount to anything, be anything but a disappointment and a shame to the parents that brought him into the world." Why, he wasn't half as much a man as his sister! And in that curious way so many mothers have about their children, every stroke of black she painted on Eric's character reappeared as a stroke of white on Dora's!

Yet under all her feelings of pique and wounded pride, his mother's heart was more disturbed and anxious than it had ever been. She had spoken the truth when she said that her "eyes were opened at last." She had never before appreciated the meanings of the things she had been seeing all along in him—his faults, his irresponsibility, his tantrums—things she had been enduring and making allowances for in view of the rosy future she was always painting for him. His future was no longer rosy—it was drab streaked with black!—and the only hope of its ever being rosy again lay in Dora.

"She's his guardeen—she's got the right to force him to come home if he won't for his mother," thought she. "She's got his father's will and the law back of her, and he's got nothing at all back of him but—*tantrums!* And he knows it, and he knows I know it and everybody else in the community. If he hasn't found out what folks think of him and his goings-on, he very soon will, I can tell him; and he'll get no sympathy for the way he's acted up toward his legal guardeen—and his own sister, too; not a nobler, more beautiful character in the world—treating her like the dirt beneath his feet! But she'll straighten him out and make a man of him."

She seemed to regard him as a lump of soft, sweet dough and Dora as a cooky-cutter, and afterward fell to wondering why it was that Eric and Polly, the children for whom she "had done everything, sacrificed everything," were the ones who showed her "ingratitude, disobedience, and disrespect," while Dora never did. Their mother began by calling it "the irony of fate," and ended by believing it "one of the inscrutable ways of Providence past finding out."

She fell asleep that night thinking of Dora's study, her beautiful character, her promise, "I'll not leave you," drowsily murmuring, in satisfied security: "*She'll*

make them do what's right—she'll make them obey—she's their guardeen."

His mother's ominous parting shot was the first glimmer of Eric's awakening to the fact that she had any "side" to their relationship he was bound to respect: for the first time in his life he saw her as an independent individual with a will and ideas of her own, instead of a personal servitor belonging to him by rights to treat as he pleased. In that awakening, his whole world changed its aspect: the bottom seemed dropping out of everything. He was so glum at supper that Addie couldn't even rouse him to ire over his "rights" and his "wrongs," though she used all her artful suggestions and her eyes on him. He finally snapped at her grouchyly, "Aw, quit it, Addie—cut it out! Yer talkin' through yer hat. Y' don't know nothin' about what's worryin' me now, er what's goin' on at home"; and he left the table. He hadn't told her about his mother—he didn't want anybody to know that she was "down on" him, too; for it left him without a leg to stand on, and proved his father—"a wise one"!

"What would folks say if they knew?" he kept asking himself bitterly, and pretending to himself that he didn't know the answer. It was: "Eric, yer father, he knew what y' was when he made his will; but yer worse'n what even he thought if yer own mother's got to throw y' down." No more sympathy for him anywhere! Even Addie didn't seem to like him as much as she'd pretended!

Addie had just shot after him in angry, scornful tones: "Well, y' can jes' bet if 'twas *me*, I'd be *man* enough to go home an' stay there till I got things fixed the way I *wanted* 'em. I'd not be hanging round other folks's homes actin' like a cat that's had its tail stepped on, an'

takin' out muh temper on the ones that has been kind to me."

"I'm man enough—don't you worry," he shot back, and slammed the door.

Everybody down on him! Why, it was awful—and what had he done to merit such treatment? The future was very, very dark. Perhaps he'd better just die and end it all. *Then* they'd feel sorry! They'd realize that he had a few good points after all—folks always do—when you're dead and gone; and they'd never get over it when they knew how they'd driven him to it with their unkindness. It would serve them right, too: and they could never again pretend to anybody that they'd been kind, after they saw him dead! Folks would say they must of persecuted him to death!

He was lying out on some loose alfalfa at the foot of a stack while soothing his wounded vanity with these adolescent maunderings, when a thought shot through him that brought him bolt upright: Dora would be glad to have him out of the way!—she might shed a tear or two—crocodile tears—so folks wouldn't say she had no decent feelin's, but in her heart she'd be glad—it would leave her a free hand with everything—nobody able to give her a squeak of opposition—and in the end, she would get his share!

"The hell she will!" he ejaculated. "Well, I'll see if she hogs it all—mine an' Polly's—an' me a man stand by an' never let out a yap to stop her! I guess Addie ain't so fur wrong—it's up to—*a man*—to fix things the way *I* want 'em! . . . Huh! Have it all her own way? The hell she will—an' me a man!"

He rolled the words: "The hell she will—an' me a man!" under his tongue with relish, and each time he swallowed them something deep in his insides seemed to swell until it finally exploded: "I'll go home to-

morra! Then we'll see if she'll do me outa any more—
an' me a man! I've been a blind fool—that's what!
I've *lettum* treat me like a boy—that's what!—Dora,
mom', Addie, an' all the rest of 'em. Now I'll show
them folks over to the ranch—the whole kit an' caboodle
of 'em—that they got something to reckon with besides
a bunch o' calicoes: they got *a man settin' in the game
with 'em!*"

When at last he slept, he slept soundly and at peace
with himself and the world. It was the peace that comes
through power; for he had that day begun to be, though
in a groping, tentative, insecure way, what he had
claimed to be—a man.

CHAPTER XV

ERIC came home next day—galloped up to the door shouting, primed with large intentions, advice from Addie, and enough whiskey to make intentions and advice effective. As a parting morsel, “to chew on the way over,” she had admonished him: “Now you lookka here, Eric—you jes’ show yerself a man an’ not a *kid*: be slick. That sister o’ your’n ’s a slick one herself—you gotta show her yer *on*—she can’t come it over you, if she does over yer mother. Show her there’s two can set in her game, an’ one of ’em’s her own brother. You tried the other thing—hollerin’ at her—an’ a lot o’ good it done y’. Much she cares fer hollerin’ an’ threats when she’s got the law on her side an’ can do *you* outa everything, while you do her outa nothin’ at all—much she cares! You big galoot—” she tapped him affectionately on the cheek, “ain’t y’ got sense enough to see who butters yer bread—or had ought to? Ain’t she figgerin’ to do you outa everything an’ keep it herself? Can’t y’ see how every time y’ act up like what y’ done that Sunday, y’ only put a knife in her hand fer to cut y’ off with later?”

“Mebbe she ain’t as bad as that,” he hazarded feebly. Not that he didn’t want her made out worse than she really was, but he had never been able to forget her blazing indignation when he had made that accusation before, and he inwardly quailed at the idea of repeating it to her face again; which he seemed to feel Addie driving him into doing. “How dare you, Eric Feruseth!” Phew! That went through a fella like a knife! What’s

the good o' sayin' things jes' fer to git a knife inta yer insides? Huh! Only kids did them fool things; and he was on the point of explaining it thus to Addie, but she retorted: "I guess I know women—give 'em a chancet! She won't take hollerin' an' threats off'n y' no third time, an' no other woman wouldn't; not much: she'd do something fer to git even—anything she could. What got inta y' to make y' do it the first time, *I* don't know! You with everything to gain by keepin' on the right side of her, an' puttin' yerself where y' might lose it all in one smack."

"Aw, how'd I know?" he mumbled. "I didn't know what she was like—how could I?"

"Well, y' know now," she cautioned him. "An' yer common sense had ought of told y' in the first place that with anybody's got y' roped the way she has, *you* start in kickin', an' y'll find yerself throwed an' hog-tied. She can do it—an' she will, quicker'n scat if y' give her the chancet; she'd be glad o' the excuse to tell y' to keep off'n the ranch an' never set foot on it again. Then where'd y' be at?"

"But don't you give her no chancet—not till y' *got something on her*. When y' got something on her, then's the time y' can snap yer fingers in her face an' tell her to go back where she come from. That's yer next move in the game—*git something on her*; so you gotta be slick now, slick as a whistle. If she tries to throw that Sunday up to y', why you be slicker still. Say y' come home a-purpose fer to tell her how sorry y' was fer it—y' been thinkin' it over till y' see it ain't right fer sister an' brother fer to be quarrellin'—they'd ought to be *friends*, an' you mean fer to do yer share. Play that up on her——"

"But suppose she seen through it that I was only playin' it up fer to git something outa her?" he inter-

rupted. That was where his mother came out in him—instinctively; he abhorred false pretenses of friendship and affection for personal gain, though the feeling was still vague and unformulated, a wordless disgust; he despised people who treated him so, but he was too unsuspecting, too easily clouded by emotion to detect designing hypocrisy very often, even when it stared him in the face—as it now did from Addie, and all he felt was a nameless repulsion.

Addie artfully beclouded the real meaning of her suggestion by demanding: "Why shouldn't y' play that up on her? There ain't no reason why a brother an' sister can't be friends—if they wanta be; an' folks says it's queer if they ain't. All I'm tellin' y' is it's your place to say the first word—you was the one set out to play up bein' an enemy, not her, so you gotta play up bein' the friend by sayin' yer sorry. She's a whole lot too slick fer to say she's her brother's enemy—she'd be more fool than I take her fer—er any other woman—if she did! She'll say she's yer *friend*—best friend y' got—only lookin' after yer interests—wants to help y' all she can—that's the line she'll take. Well, then, soon's y' git her to that point, why you bring up about the money that's comin' into the ranch now—the cattle, an' all that—an' say as how she had ought to give her brother an allowance. She will—she won't dare not to—if y' put it up to her right and pleasant, an' don't go actin' like a steer in a hornet's nest."

"Aw, don't worry, Addie—I ain't quite all the fool kid yer makin' out. I ain't goin' to give her one inch more rope on me 'n what she's got—betcher life I ain't!"

"Well then, show a little common sense this time: be *slick*—chaw on that all the way over—put it in yer pipe an' smoke it—an' when y' git there, act——"

"Act the cat with a saucer of cream!" he grinned,

and took a swig from his pocket-flask. "I guess I git the idear."

"You better!" said she shortly and, as he bolted off, muttered under her breath, "The fool! What's he s'pose I want o' him without the prop'ty? Think I'm willin' to live in this hole of a ranch the rest o' muh life because he can't be slick with that stuck-up sister o' his'n an' git his rights? If he can't git something now, an' only a girl to deal with, what 'ud he ever git anywheres? I think I see muhself marryin' him! Posey Burnham's ten times the man an' not a hundredth part of Eric's prospects—he's all there an' no women tagged ont a him, neither!" and she went in to direct half a dozen meretricious postal cards to as many young men—Eric being one—and rode over to the office in hopes of a few mementos of the same sort for her "albums," one of which she showed only to a chosen few of her most trusty friends.

Being "slick" was an entirely new rôle to Eric and he had only the vaguest ideas as to how it was played, but his fresh resolves, his sense of manly power, and the whiskey he had swallowed as a bracer made him feel equal to anything. So by way of beginning his part, he bellowed out when he reached the door, "H'lo, mom'! H'lo, Polly!" and came splashing into the kitchen, where his mother was making pies, and sweeping her off her feet before she could wipe the flour off her hands, he deposited three resounding kisses on her cheek, calling her the sweetest, dearest ole mommsie in the whole world, and then loudly demanded: "Where's Dora at?" He considered that the last touch of "slickness"—it proved to all and sundry that he had nothing to be either afraid or ashamed of when he came home.

To his mother, however, it was the last touch of what

she had to be afraid and ashamed of when he came home: she knew, even if she had not smelled the liquor on his breath, that he must be enough under its influence to dare anything that came into his head, and she thought instantly: "I wonder what that Addie Rohmer's been puttin' him up to? But to think of Dody seein' him like this? What's got into him? What'll she say? What'll I do?" She was wiping her hands hastily on her apron with a gesture very like wringing them while repeating over and over, "What'll she say if she sees him like this? What'll I do?" too flustered to get out another word after her astonished exclamation: "Why, Eric, is that you?" His coming at all, considering yesterday, was enough to take her by surprise; and she had been picturing a very different coming—a reformed, penitent, apologetic Eric, saying he was sorry and promising to be good and behave. Instead, he was booming at her impatiently, "Whatsa matter? I ast—where's Dora at? Ain't she home—er what?" which caused her to find tongue enough to urge him, "Set down, darlin', take off your hat and set down while I get that nut cake for you out of the commissary. Set down—or ain't you got to take your horse up to the corral?" she added, thinking by the inspiration of this suggestion to secure a few minutes in which to warn Dora of his condition and to "make allowances."

But Polly had already forestalled her there—with her nose for news and her eye for the passing show, she scudded off to announce the advent of the star, yelling through the wall, her hands for speaking-trumpet, "Oh, Dody, Eric's come home! He wants to see you 'bout something right off *quick*, so hurry up!" and thus Dora appeared in the kitchen at the very moment her mother was shoosing Eric out of it.

"Well, h'lo Dora!" he bellowed at her across the room, in a manner meant to be agreeable—and that would have been to Addie Rohmer,—and to prove that bygones were bygones between them.

She held out her hand and looked at him inquiringly.

He hadn't expected to have to shake hands; still, he must be "slick," so he took her hand sheepishly in a flabby grasp for half a second and dropped it like a hot cake, hastening on with his part: "Glad yer home—didn't know's I'd find y' home—girls don't stay home much now'days—no place like home when y' come right down to it. Heard from mom' y'd built on a palatial bungalow attachment an' thought I'd take a couple of days off to come over 'n' see how you's gettin' on. Quite some time since I been home." He gave her an expansive smile, and the opportunity to invite him in; but seeing she didn't take either as he meant, but stood there silent, and to prove that he "meant business clear way through," he announced boldly: "Well, anyways, guess we'll have a look at yer shebang 'fore dark. Where's it at? Which way?"

She still hesitated. This was almost too much—a dirty, smelly rowdy invading her in such offhand fashion. She didn't suspect that he was partially intoxicated, or she would have refused him pointblank. Her mother knew it and was hastily preparing for whatever might happen; though this time she meant to see that nothing did happen—she would pour oil on the troubled waters the instant he got inside of Dora's study by telling him, "*This* is how I lived when I was a girl at home in Ireland!—surrounded by every luxury money could buy," and pointing to the portrait of Whistler's mother, "It's the living image of my dear old grandmother—*your* great-grandmother: *she* wore a cap just like that." Then he would realize at last what his

mother was, and why he couldn't drag a woman of her position about over the country to see him at horse-camps and Rohmers' ranches, as she had told him yesterday. As she turned to dry her hands on the roller-towel she caught Dora's wireless eye-telegram—"Please keep Polly out—I must tackle this alone," and almost in the same instant, Eric pointed his finger at Polly and let off: "Now look-a-here, Miss Snoopy, this time . . . *you . . . stay out . . . till yer ast . . . to come in . . . by me!* I wanta see Dora alone."

His mother was dreadfully hurt and disappointed, she did so want to read Eric's wonder direct from his face and lips, witness his first awakening to what all this was and stood for in her life, not have the wonder chilled and served out to her later as a picked-up, warmed-over dish; and, anyway, she knew she ought to be there as oil-pourer; Polly was whimpering her usual "I think you're mean," in a tentative way, hoping for reinforcements before committing herself to slam-door flight; and Eric was suddenly realizing his dreadful error in military tactics: he had burned his bridges, leaving his reinforcements on the wrong side. Five seconds later the enemy was leading him captive to her den.

Certain rooms have the same power of silent snubbing exercised by certain individuals—through the unconscious atmosphere they exhale. Hardly had he crossed the sill, when Eric began to feel snubbed. He didn't belong in that room—it jeered at him from head to heels, and told him to go out to the kitchen where he did belong. He sank into the chair Dora indicated and began fiddling in his pockets, not raising his eyes, and asking himself, "What's she gotta say to me, I wonder—fetch me in here like this?" until he happened on his tobacco and felt rescued. Drawing it out and spilling a ridge carelessly into a paper, he observed, while rolling it: "Y"

got quite some books here—didn't know they was so many books printed as all them." To which she replied modestly, "Yes, I have a few," and he reassured her, trying to be "slick" and easy, "I call it *quite some*," and ran his tongue along the edge of the paper. "An' y' must know an awful lot if y' learnt all them. Where's a match at? Oh, I see—" and jumping up, he lunged at her little tea-table with its frail crockery set out around the lamp and kettle, snatched a match, and sent a cup smashing into the fireplace.

"Sorry!" he exclaimed laconically, but so panic-struck he was for taking to his heels then and there, and would have done so, only she hastened to reassure him cordially: "Never mind—don't bother about it—I have more that I haven't unpacked." One of those sourly true and sweetly false politenesses that good breeding demands: she had more more cups but none like that.

"Glad y' have," he returned, much relieved, and drawing his match across the fireplace, he began puffing and communicating. "Y' seem to got quite a lot o' things here—considerin'—more'n in the whole house. Books . . . pictures . . . easy-chairs . . . carpet on the floor . . . quite fixed up." He flipped ashes off on the rug, and stepping to the shelves ran his finger along the backs of a row of books, and to show her how much at ease he was with books, he demanded, "Which is a good one? Which would I like?" and drew forth an algebra. He could barely read, and didn't want her to know it, particularly now, and thought that in borrowing a book he proved himself both brotherly and educated; so he was a little put out to have her tell him, "There isn't a thing you'd care for," and grumbled, "I dunno why I wouldn't—I like a good story same as the next fella, I guess," and was even less mollified

when she told him: "But they aren't stories. The one you have is an algebra—the one next is a trig.—and you'd not care for those, I'm sure."

"I dunno why I wouldn't," he muttered through his cigarette, thinking: "Means to set herself up, does she? Guess if a girl can read 'em an' like 'em, a man can too, if he feels like it."

He threw his cigarette in the fire and rolled a fresh one, determined to stand his ground till he had shown her he wasn't to be put down as easily as she seemed to think—show her a few other things, though precisely what he couldn't recall at the moment, for he seemed to hear her saying to herself, "How I wish he'd go before he smashes something else," at the very minute she was saying out loud, "Won't you sit down and let me make you a cup of tea, Eric?" with beautiful politeness.

"Aw, tea! Sissy stuff," he sneered, not to be taken in with politeness, though he condescended to sit down on the arm of a Morris chair. "How you girls can drink that slop! . . . But since yer settin' up refreshments, I wouldn't mind a taste o' the *right thing*."

"Of what?"

"A nip o' something that's man-drink."

"Why—what do you mean?"

"Aw, come now, whatcher givin' us? Don't tell me y' ain't got it stowed a-plenty inside that there settee, er whatcher-may-call-it, with the closet in the bottom." He pointed to the box-divan in the corner of the room, an article of furniture never seen in that part of the country before; but Freddie Woodhull, who had brought it up from the station and unpacked it for her, and professed to know the ways of civilization and college life, had communicated a large assortment of information as to the uses of such hiding-places. "Y' can't fool me—I know what them bed-boxes is used fer."

"And what do you think I've got in there?" She still hadn't grasped his insinuation and was thinking only of what was in there—her freshly ironed shirt-waists.

"Whiskey. Brandy. Fancy cordials o' some kind—I don't know you college girls' drinks, but what's good enough fer you's good enough fer me, I guess. I ain't so old a dog I can't be learnt no new tricks."

"How *can* you—how can you *think* such a thing—" Indignation choked her.

Outraged innocence and the frightened denial of guilt bear so close a resemblance in their expressions that suddenly the idea popped into his head: "I bet I hit it! She *has* got stuff stowed there an' she's concealin' it! Addie was right after all—she suspected somethin' outa the way from the first. She said it ain't natural fer a girl to wanten git off by herself like this here lessen they is something wrong. Addie's up to all their tricks—she knowed what she's about when she told me for to come home an' find out what's really goin' on here. If I can prove it on Dora now, I got her where I want her: muh gardeeen boozin' on the q. t. Boss me—nix! Not after I know. The court'll remove her." He stood up and flung his cigarette violently into the fireplace, jamming his hands into his pockets: his great moment had arrived—he'd show her now that she was trying to sit in the game with—a *man*! "I'll git the whip-handle end of her in one swipe," thought he; and gave forth boldly: "How can I think it, hey? Well, y' musta took me fer quite some kid not to think it—I warn't born yestiddy."

"Oh! So that's what you came home to see me for—see me alone!" she said, rising as she spoke. "I've been—wondering."

That gave him a new cue—he could make good his

previous assertion with a reason that was both weighty and startling: she had called his bluff and he had the cards! He honked in her face: "Been wonderin'—how much I'd see through all this here!" He indicated the whole room with a jerk of his head. "Been wonderin'—what I'd say when I did see through it! Huh! Well, I'll tell y'——"

"Will you first kindly explain what you mean by your term 'see through it'?" she cut in icily.

"I mean: See inter yer little game—here."

"What 'game,' may I ask?"

"Aw, come—y' can't bluff me! A man's onta things, all right."

"I'm not trying to 'bluff' you—whatever that may mean; I'm merely trying to discover *what* you 'see through'—or think you do."

"See through—*you!*"

"Ah! indeed!"

"Y' don't fool me none."

"And you came home to tell me—that? It seems hardly necessary to have taken so much trouble"—her lip curled—"to communicate the self-evident, since I 'fool' nobody."

"Y've fooled mom' all right—but I ain't mom' ner Polly."

"Really, Eric, I must protest. Your being my brother gives you no right to use such language—make such insinuations—and I'll not permit it."

"How'll y' stop it, I'd like to know? This here's a free country—a man's gotta right to speak; if y' ain't found it out where y' been to school, y'll find it out in Wyoming fast enough. I got two rights to tell y' what I think—one right as a brother, one right as a *man*. See? The rights ain't all on your side, even if y' are muh gardeeen."

The reminder of this relationship checked her intention of ordering him out; for both their sakes she must discover what he was muddling over and disabuse his mind—with tact. Still, her voice was icy with ill-concealed sarcasm when she asked him where and how he had gotten the idea that she had “spirituous liquors concealed in the room.”

“Where?” She didn’t catch him with that: he would not give Addie away quite so easily. “Y’ ain’t even denied it.”

“Then I do now—*emphatically!*”

That rather took the wind out of his sails, and in the pause, while he considered where to make the next attack—for he wasn’t by any means through with her now he had warmed up to showing her he was a man—she pursued him with: “But how did you ever come to think such a thing about me?”

“What would I think—er anybody else—when a girl with a whole house fer to live in—mother an’ sister to keep her comp’ny—takes off by herself an’ builds a bungalow like this here fer to git away by herself so nobody can’t see what she’s up to? Whadda y’ s’pose folks is sayin’ about it, anyways? Saying, ‘either she drinks er takes drugs’—that’s what, if y’ wanta know. A girl’s been away to college ten years—never come home all that time—how’s anybody to know what she’s learnt to do back East in them wicked cities like N’ York? Huh!

“What made me think? What would I think when I hear my sister’s shuttin’ herself up alone in a room built a-purpose—pertendin’ she’s wantin’ to read an’ got books nobody wants to read—got a comf’table lounge—pillas an’ cushions piled up all ready fer to take it easy when she gits sleepy? Natchelly, I think she’s got *some reason* fer takin’ it so easy—folks mostly does

have. So bein' muh sister, I think she'll ante up a nip if she's got it handy, since she's offerin' refreshments, an' when I ast her. . . . I don't know whatcher starin' at me like that fer! Mom', she gives it to me to sober up on, she don't hand me out no *looks* to go with it, neither. . . . I happened to want a drop jes' now—couple of fingers would 'a' done me. I ast y' friendly enough—if y' ain't got it, say so——”

“I did say so. And I'll say something more: I have never even tasted liquor in my life.”

He stared at her incredulously. Why, every girl he had ever seen or heard of at least took a glass of beer once in a while, even Polly. “Never tasted liquor?” he echoed.

“Never.”

The case he had been building up against her came tumbling down—he was more on the wrong side with her than he had suspected: if she could say that, what would she say about him? There wasn't anything in the world he wanted more at the moment than a couple of fingers of whiskey—his insides literally gnawed for it, and he had emptied his flask on the way over. But his mother had a bottle hidden away for him to sober up on—he would go ask her. . . . No, he wouldn't go! Dora couldn't stand there like a white-winged holiness angel and drive him out with any “*Nevers!*” . . . Show her who was the *man* . . . wouldn't budge one step till he had “got somethin on” her like Addie said to do, and this might be the only chance. . . . And Addie said “be slick,” too—that was the word to go by—think of something pleasant . . . kinda-sorta lead along . . . she was mad about that busted cup . . . a few pleasant words now, and she would start in talking——

Just then Dora's words dropped with icy sarcasm: “Was that the weighty matter you came home, as man

and brother, to see me about alone—my tipping on the sly?”

His glance had been travelling uneasily about the room avoiding her, and came back to note that she had drawn herself up and thrown back her shoulders. Standing thus, the outlines of the letter showed distinctly where Polly had told him Dora kept it hidden—in the bosom of her waist. There was his answer ready-made—the “weighty matter” that explained everything, why he had rushed off as her “enemy” before, why he had come home now to be friends! And on the inspiration of this thought, and still cautioning himself to “be slick,” he blurted: “I come home to see y’ ’bout that letter of papa’s—I can’t seem fer to git it outa muh head, noways. I wanta see it an’ I’ll never be happy till I do see it—that’s all thez to it—to me bein’ here, er not here—so y’ might’s well understand it first as last: I’ll never be happy till I know what’s in that letter.”

He challenged her precisely as he would have challenged his mother, words, tone, suggestion: you owe me happiness—give it or take the consequences! His mother had never refused and braved the consequences—she so loved to see him happy. The tender chord—that was the one to strike with women; what a pity he hadn’t tried it the first time with Dora! He thrummed it lightly again to make sure by adding: “So if y’ wanta make me *happy* . . . that’s how.”

But he was challenging a different breed. Dora was flaring in an instant. She flung at him: “And you dare to stand there and ask me a second time to betray a sacred trust to make you—*happy*?” in scorn-soaked tones that made happiness seem the most preposterous thing in her estimation a person could ask.

At this unexpected return attack his thoughts flew

all to bits; but he let her have the bits as they came to hand: "Ain't it right fer me to be happy?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Ain't it right fer me to tell y' what'll make me happy?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"If I didn't tell y', how d'y' know?"

Silence.

"I thought mebbe y' didn't know . . . you bein' away from home so long . . . secrets in the fam'ly—nobody could be happy . . . a man can't, anyways: it's why I told y'. . . . Don't y' wanta make me happy?"

"What has that to do with this case?"

"What has it?" She couldn't have asked a more disconcerting question: his happiness *was* "this case"!

"Why—er—everything. It's why I come home——"

"So you've said already—that you came whining for a crust of—happiness; a bit of sugar cake."

"And ain't I gotta right to be happy?"

"By such means?"

"Y' mean jes' askin' y' to tell me—yer own brother—anyways?"

"You're not asking me to 'tell you'—you're asking me to betray my father's secret; one that concerns you not an atom, and that you haven't the remotest right to know."

"Haven't, hey? His own son—much his child as you are."

"Which has nothing to do with it."

"I dunno *why* it hasn't. You bein' a girl don't give you no special rights to papa as I can see."

"*Which* has nothing to do with either your request, or my refusal, that *I* can see."

"It has a lot to do with it, you bein' a girl—it has a

lot to do with *me*. It's one reason I come to y' now. I thought you bein' a girl, y'd natchelly have some feelin's; an' me bein' a man, why—" Having floundered as far as that, he stopped.

"Oh, so that's it!" she sneered. "You thought my being a girl and you a man, I'd 'jes' natchelly' have to humor you; that all you had to do was to whine about your 'feelin's,' and I'd do whatever you wanted. Well, yours aren't the only feelings in the case—there are others quite as important. Perhaps more so. My father's feelings are the first to be considered, and I know precisely what they were in regard to this matter."

For a moment that seemed to settle him; then he changed his tone and inquired: "Don't y' think the feelin's of the livin' is more important than the feelin's o' the dead—that ain't got any anyways?"

"Feelings! *Feelings!* Have you no feelings of—common decency?" she cried. "Is there nothing you'll stop at in your effort to gratify your babyish curiosity? Are moral principles nothing against your feelings? Is your happiness to be bought by a betrayal—is that your idea? And you think I'll do it?—stand there whining about your feelings, actually believing me capable of such treachery to my father's trust as showing you a letter he never intended you to see? Have you *no* sense of honor? . . . My brother—his son; if I hadn't heard this from your own lips I couldn't have believed it! And—you—call—yourself—a—man!"

The fury that took him then seemed to turn his blood to boiling water, and his muscles to steel—he felt the way he did sometimes when he was breaking a "wicked" horse: he'd break it or kill it, and—he'd break *her*, or kill her!—if he had no "moral principles," no "sense of

honor," he had something else—will and strength—that she'd have to respect.

"By God—I'll show *you* who's the *man*!" he shouted at her. "Now you gimme that letter! Here—hand it over, an' do it p. d. q.!"

Involuntarily, her hands flew to her breast and she clutched the letter, but the only word she uttered was, "Never!"

In a flash he had both her wrists in his big hands, twisted her arms behind her back, pushed her against the wall, and holding her thus pinioned, he wrenched the letter from her bosom.

He took it to the light. Not waiting to remove the pages, he tore off the envelope, this way and that, dropping it on the floor, and, hastily opening out the thick pad, he skimmed the sheets looking for his own name; he dared not stop to read carefully, though, even had he had time for it, his education wasn't equal to deciphering the cramped, pathetic scrawl. But, in bold relief from the rest of the page, he read, "I lost God on the plains," and at the end, trailing off to the signature, "I leave you. . . ."

So his father hadn't left anything after all!—was just beginning the sentence that would have changed everything. All this fat letter about—nothing! All Dora's secrecy about—nothing! All the family curiosity, the arguments and apprehensions about—nothing! All the neighbors' gossip and speculations—all Addie Rohmer's hints and insinuations about—nothing! . . . And all *this*—to find out nothing, only that his father had "lost God on the plains"—as if anybody cared a rap for *that*. All this, for only that! . . . He raised his eyes and looked at Dora, then stood there staring at her.

From the instant he had seized her wrists she had not

uttered a sound, nor made a move—she was just where he had left her, her back to the wall, her hands behind her, white and still as a statue. She looked like snow; frozen. She was really frozen with horror at what he had done; without exception, it was the worst thing that had ever happened to her; so unbelievably shocking she asked herself if she were awake, or having nightmare.

His fury died down faster than it had burned up, and as he watched her, something froze in him, too. Why didn't she speak? Had he—hurt her? Was she—alive still? He began to feel afraid and felt himself go limp; with it came the thought: "I must do something." He held out the letter to her—"Here."

She didn't stir and the fear grew on him.

"Here—take it," he faltered. "I—I only read a little bit——"

Still she didn't move. . . . Suppose he had killed her! He went nearer and gazed at her earnestly to see if he had. No, she wasn't dead, but . . . somehow changed.

He now became possessed of the feeling that he must rid himself of the letter and get it back to her again to make her as she was before; that if she would take it, and put in her bosom, it would somehow excuse him; so he kept offering it to her. "Here—take it!" folding it clumsily after each offer into smaller and smaller proportions, as if that would facilitate her reaching for it and tucking it out of sight, thus forgiving him.

"Here—I only a read a little bit," he repeated weakly, trying to plead with her. "There's a lot I didn't see. . . . I won't tell, if that's what yer 'fraid of—nobody won't know from *me* what's in it . . . an' *he* won't know, so he can't blame you fer showin' it. Here—I'm givin' it back to y'—sayin' I'm sorry I done it—wouldn't of,

if I'd stopped to think. . . . Ain't y' goin' to fergive me—when I say I'm sorry I done it?"

She heard him, she saw him; knew he wanted her to say something she couldn't say even had she wished to. Though she didn't wish to—she felt she had said all—definitely, finally, completely all she ever wished to say to him while they two lived. And in the midst of that feeling of paralysis of will and wish, she suddenly experienced one of her fugitive intuitions as she had with her mother; became clairvoyantly aware as it were of an inner reality in which he and she together participated: That they were meeting each other, blood against blood, race against race; that the generations back of him and his mother stood there confessing and calling out to be shriven of sin, while the Puritan generations back of her and her father were declaring: "No pronouncement can shrive! You have done this deed—you must bear its consequences. Nothing I can say can forgive you." Only one person in the universe—their dead father—could forgive and utter the absolving words. With that, she seemed to have a sort of vision of Eric wandering and seeking from world to world of the starry firmament to find his father's soul and get forgiveness; wandering for ages, always with this burden of sin, like a pack upon his shoulders. The violence he had done her personally she didn't think of—that dropped from her consciousness as the vision, if such it could be called, came in; and while it was before her, she thought only of Eric—saw him as one lost on the plains by night and seeking a way home to pardon. That was his goal—pardon; absolution through seeking. Of the finding she saw nothing—all was dark but the wandering figure. A terrible pity welled up in her heart for him, as it had before with her mother; but unlike that time, she couldn't throw herself into

his arms as she had into her mother's, and come to an immediate understanding—of a sort; she could only stand there petrified.

As for him, he seemed to take on some of her petrification without knowing why, and stopped offering the letter, feeling only that punishment was coming—what, he couldn't imagine, but he knew he had done something at last he couldn't square with a few words of contrition, or make all right with a kiss: he had come home to be slick—and this is what he had *done*! His future turned black as ink. "Well, I didn't mean no harm—didn't know y'd git such hard feelin's—dunno what I can say more'n I have," he muttered under his breath, and laying the letter carefully on the table, he slunk out of the room.

CHAPTER XVI

"WHAT all religious, pure, and tender souls are least able to pardon is the diminution or degradation of their ideal." Dora came out from under her cloud of pity for Eric, feeling besmirched and despoiled, the two feelings weaving together into a fantastic fabric in her mind: poor boy, but how utterly contemptible! Something precious and perfumed within her had shed its petals; something iridescent had tarnished, more from the atmosphere of vice breathed over it in her brother's suggestions of her tipping on the sly, than from what he had actually done to her in stealing his father's letter. *That* was somehow understandable—considering Eric!—but the other! For the first time her reputation had been assailed, her soul's honor—the honor of a strong spirit scorning the vices of the weak and striving to hold aloft the banner of its ideals. Never before had she had this sense of inner ravishment.

She sank into a chair, numb, sick, and sat there motionless while twilight fell, then night, moving only to throw a log on the crumbling embers and coax a little heat into the room, for outside a hoarfrost was falling. From the kitchen came faint sounds of supper-getting, but nobody called her; nor would she have gone out—she couldn't see Eric again that night. Presently boisterous men's voices, ribald laughter, songs, and all sorts of noises floated out on the still air. It sounded as if the men were intoxicated; but how could they be?—her mother was there. Polly, too—poor little Polly. . . . Freddie Woodhull sang in a high falsetto. The

only words Dora distinguished were: "But I saw it!" yet something in the tone brought color to her cheeks. Loud applause followed. . . . Polly's voice rose in a shrill: "Eric, you stop it! Lemme be!" Her mother remonstrated. . . . Silence for a little, then Freddie began crowing—cock-a-doodle-doo. Neil began a harangue. Freddie kept on crowing. It became a duel between "Down with the cap't'list" and "cock-a-doodle-doo" until Eric stopped it by shouting, "Aw, quit it! I'm the boss here!" and a chair went crashing. . . . Silence again for a few moments, then somebody began drumming, apparently with knife-handles on the table, rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat-tat-tat, and all the men's voices rose in song together.

At the end of an hour of it, Dora was convinced that all the men were drinking; she assumed that Eric had started it to get even with her; to defy her. She was face to face with her big moral problem then. Should she permit it in the house of which she was the legal as well as the virtual head? Could she stop it if she tried? Ought she to try—with her mother out there permitting it, as she must be doing? . . . Stop it, of course! . . . She half rose from her chair, determined to walk into the midst of them and say— What could she say when she got there? A vague terror possessed her—she had never seen men intoxicated; didn't know what they were like; what they would say or do. If Eric sober could so abuse her, what might he do drunk in company with drunken ranch-hands? . . . What if her mother were drinking, too, and Polly? No, that *couldn't* be! But why did she stay out there? Why hadn't she come to the study? Dora sank back in her chair. All her decisions were paralyzed. She ought to find out what was happening—she ought to stay as far as possible from what was happening; she sat perfectly still,

except for an occasional shudder as a particularly boisterous shout came rolling along the hallway; and every so often the words seemed to blaze before her eyes: "And Eric is *my father's—son!*" In spite of herself she groaned inwardly: "Oh, father, why did you leave him to me? You must have known what he was when you made that will! I can't do anything with him."

A shrill whisper came through the window: "Dody! Dody!"

Dora straightened up to attention.

"Dody, are you there?" It was Polly's voice; her head was dimly visible.

"Yes, I'm here."

"May I come in? You got your door locked."

Dora hurriedly unlocked the door and Polly flashed through, catching her around the waist and panting: "Lock it again, Dody, quick!"

"What is it, Polly?"

"Oh, a *newful* drunk—worst one I ever see 'em in."

Dora sat down and took the child in her lap, searching her face by the uncertain light of the fire—a wide-eyed frightened face as Polly told what had happened. Eric had come stamping out into the kitchen and asked his mother for the bottle she kept for him to sober up on; when she went to pour a little in a glass, he snatched the bottle and drank out of it; then made her get another she had hidden, and some beer, and treated all the men when they came in to supper. "Mamma tried to stop him, an' he told her to—*shut up!*—so y' may know how awful drunk he is—ragin' drunk—seein'-red drunk—er he will be soon." Polly gasped this out with relish—she had never in her life had such dramatic news to communicate, and rattled on: "He told her he's a man now an' able to 'cide fer himself if he drinks, an' how much he drinks; an' when she said fer him not to give

it to the men, he told her to shut up again—that when he took a drink, he took it open an' aboveboard, not on the sly, so folks could know what he was. He said:

“ Drink an' the world drinks with y',
Swear off, an' y' drink alone,”

an' that he hadn't swore off, so he wasn't drinkin' alone. An' when she told him he hadn't ort to be drinkin' *a-tall*, alone er in comp'ny, why he told her to shut up *again*—that he warn't no deacon in the church—no long-tongued, slick-haired, goat-bearded deacon—he's *a man*; an' what's more, he's master o' this ranch since papa died, an' he'd show *you*, will er no will, law er no law, that he had a right to be happy. . . . That's when he got the third bottle away from her. . . . Mamma's awful frightened now at how he's goin' on—she told me to go out so's he'd not notice, but she don't dare to leave him fer fear he'll start shootin' up the place, when he gits to the seein'-red stage, an' he's mos' there.”

Dora's exclamation at this Polly found very vivifying, and confided artlessly: “He done it oncet before, only mamma didn't tell you—the night the will come home an' he found papa didn't leave him his rights. He got awful drunk that night—worse'n any time at all 'cept this time—but he didn't shoot to hit; put a bullet through the winder, that's all. But he says he's goin' to shoot to hit—*somebody*—to-night, an' he means it, too. Mamma's been tryin' fer to git his gun away from him, but he won't leave her even come near him on that side. She thought she'd git a chancet if he got drunker—it's why she let him have the beer she had hid away—he didn't know she had the beer—it makes him sleepy quicker'n whiskey. But he ain't got sleepy yet—none of 'em has—they're singin' an' cuttin' up worse every minute!”

"I must go out to the kitchen," said Dora firmly, making a motion to rise; but Polly threw the whole weight of her little body against her sister, pinning her down tighter by grasping the arms of the chair, exclaiming: "No, Dody, no! You mustn't go out there now—y' don't know what they might do to y', way they are!"

But Dora's blood was up—here was a case for the head of the house to deal with, not hide behind locked doors and leave it to a frightened, weak mother; and trying to put Polly off her lap, she inquired: "What can they do to me? Please let go, dear."

"Do? What can they do? Why, Dody, ain't you never saw a man when he's seein'-red drunk?" She couldn't quite understand how a sister of this age could have missed that experience; and when Dora answered tartly, "I have not—but that has nothing to do with it; please let go," Polly informed her: "Well, then, lemme tell y' they're *awful* when they git that way: I've saw 'em, an' I know. Worse'n wolves an' coyotes any day, specially when they got guns on way Eric has an' tell their mothers to shut up! They're beginnin' to see red then, mamma says, when they say that to the mothers that bore 'em in pain an' sorrow; an' they go on from that till y' don't know what they'll do, an' they don't know—an' don't care, neither! Freddie Woodhull, he's only nasty so far—I don't know how soon he'll begin fer to see red—I ain't never seen him when he sees red—I ain't never seen Freddie drunk at all before this; he goes off the ranch to have his drunks an' gambles—goes down to Rock River to a saloon an' don't come home till it's all over, so I don't know 'bout him, 'cept he's singin' 'bout *garters* an' mamma's lookin' mad at him. Neil,—he got up on a chair hollerin' socialism an' rights till Eric he said he'd shoot him off'n it if he didn't quit. That's when he pulled his gun an' mamma

got scared and told him to give it to her, an' he wouldn't. He didn't begin to show ugly to the men—not seein' red ugly—till then. So mamma sent me out."

"But why has mother stayed there with them?"

"She had to! Why, if she left 'em alone, they'd burn the house down if they didn't do anything worse! They do—didn't you know that? Not always, but mostly always when they's enough of 'em together. I don't say they do it a-puppose—though mebbe they do—but the way they most gen'ly do it is they drop lighted matches anywheres they happen to be near, an' then they lay out on the lounge an' drop their cigarettes when they fall asleep an' never know it till they're all afire an' the house, too. That's the way. Mamma's put out 'most twenty matches a'ready, I guess—one the head flew off right into my lap an' burnt . . . look-a-here!" She held up her apron showing the hole. "I'd 'a been dead if mamma hadn't of saw it the minute it happened! Eric threwed one match right into the wash-basket with all the dry clo'es! She put that out, too. She hasta watch 'em every minute—that's why she stays."

There was a light knock on the door. Polly clutched her sister, whispering: "Don't go! That's Eric—he said he's comin' back to show you who's the man on this ranch. Pertend we ain't here!"

In spite of this warning, Dora pushed Polly off her lap and went to the door to listen. The knock was repeated. She called through: "Who's there?"

"Olaf."

"What is it, Olaf?"

"May I speak with you a minute?"

She hesitated, but finally decided—since his voice sounded steady as usual, though suppressed—to open the door. By the light of a fitful moon the look on his

face reassured her, though for a moment he said nothing. To him she seemed ghostlike, unfamiliar; he was unable to say what he had come to her for until she asked him; then he replied in a whisper: "Well, you're boss here, so I come to you before I done anything myself—thought I'd better ast the boss if I'm doin' right doin' what's gotta be done—" He paused to scan her face and read how she was taking the whole episode, and in particular his coming to her this way, but evaded her question, "What's got to be done?" to make his coming a little more appreciated than it appeared to be by painting up the general situation thus: "Things is 'bout as bad as ever I see 'em anywheres, even down to Rock River, an' I've saw a few things in my time, too. Y' don't want no bloodshed here, but it's gittin' there if something ain't done. Yer mother—she ain't able to do anything—she ain't got no control—"

"I'm just going out there myself," Dora interrupted.

"Not you, Miss Feruseth—you mustn't go out there!" he warned her quickly. "That ain't what I come to you fer—er it is, in a way: I come partly to stop y', if you was thinkin' of it, fer y'd only make matters worse. That ain't what's gotta be done—"

"Then what's got to be done?"

"Well, we gotta manage it another way—one that won't git 'em more excited than what they are now; an' they would be if they thought anybody was tryin' fer to stop 'em—I mean anybody had the right to, like you have. Yer mother, she don't count—it was her give it to Eric anyways—they don't mind her seein' 'em, neither—it ain't the first time; but they'd mind you seein' 'em—they got jes' sense enough left fer to know you wouldn't take it the way she does: you're the boss, she ain't."

"Of course. So I'm the one——"

Carelessly as he could, he reached out and took hold of the door-jamb, barring her in with his arm while he remonstrated. "No—they mustn't see you. I'm the one. I been settin' there watchin'—I know how things is goin'. Not a drop o' liquor's passed my lips, so y' don't need to be afraid to trust me, if that's what you been thinkin', and I'm tellin' y' in sober earnest it won't do no good, you goin' out there in the kitchen with them three drunken men—it'll only set 'em off doin'—I dunno what; insultin' you mebbe."

"Yes, it would," Dora protested, feeling more than ever she was leaving her mother in the lurch by not rushing off to settle everything out of hand. "But what was your plan?"

"Well, 'cordin' to how I figger it, Neil and Eric's 'bout to the place where they'd sleep it off if they got the chancet at a bed—it's why I don't want 'em to see you and git excited with no new idears; they've 'bout wore out the idears they started with, and them fellas drops off soon's they git goin' in a circle. But that Freddie Woodhull—ornery little cuss—he takes it slower, and carries more liquor than them other fellas does—them remittance men is all that way—so he's keepin' 'em strained up—eggin' 'em on—encouragin' 'em—suggestin' new idears to 'em to see how fer he can make 'em go. That's where the real trouble lays now—Freddie. Yer mother, she's tryin' fer to make Eric go to bed, and Freddie he sticks a word in on the sly and starts him off the other way. Freddie, he'd ort to be tied up in the cow-shed—er thrown into the hog-pen—that's where *he* belongs! But what's abotherin' me is how to separate them two parties and not start a fight. I done all *I* could a'ready fer to git him out—give him every hint I could think of; but he won't go fer *me*—'cept by force, and if I try that, they'll sure be gun-

pullin'! . . . I'm sorry. I wouldn't of ast y' to help me—and be mixed up with a pup like him—if I could of saw any other way fer to do it. I'm sorry——”

She took a step away from him and asked in a tense voice, “What were you planning—to have me do?” recoiling from something vaguely disgusting and improper hinted in his words and manner.

He said “I'm sorry” again, and paused to push his hat back and scratch his head, not knowing quite how to tell her. “I really can't see no other way fer to git him outa the kitchen, but to—sorta kinda—*entice* him out—to meet you. I dunno's you've took notice, but us fellas has, Freddie, he's—sort kinda—*sweet* on you . . . I hope y' don't mind me sayin' it to yer face, but it's so, and I ain't sayin' he's ever said anything—I go by the signs—him shavin' every day and his b'iled shirts. . . . I'm sorry if y' don't like me sayin' it—I mean no offense——”

The expression on Dora's face stopped him for a moment of sheer inner triumph: she *loathed* Freddie! Until that moment, Olaf had only hoped it—he had never been sure, and now revenge for b'iled shirts, for “airs,” for everything, was at hand! She told him, rather curtly: “Well, go on, please—I'm not taking offense,” and he went on with ease and courage, and a tone of almost intimacy, since he had her feelings on his side, “So y' see, him feelin' that-a-way, if you was to come round front o' the kitchen, and me was to whisper to him you's out there waitin' to see him, why he'd come out, and all you'd hafta do after he did come out was to keep him walkin' away and talkin' till we got the others locked up. It wouldn't take five minutes, I don't think—yer mother and me can manage them two—and soon's as I have 'em under lock and key I'll 'tend to Freddie Woodhull all right, all right! I got a

rope all ready layin' there on the wagon tongue. As fer talkin' to him—you don't need fer to take no notice of what he says. Leave that to *me*—I'll pay him up fer anything he says outa the way, if he does. . . . I know it ain't pleasant, Miss Feruseth, fer a lady like you to be mixed up with a low-down, ornery little cuss like him," he added sympathetically, hoping thus to draw from her a criticism on his rival; but all he got was: "I understand, Olaf—it's an emergency."

"That's what it is!" he assured her, a trifle crest-fallen that she didn't show more appreciation of the way he was trying to serve and spare her feelings and of the championship he was exhibiting. He couldn't quite let it go at that, and started retouching his colors that she might the better see them. "I'm sorry—I sure wouldn't of ast you to do it—" but she cut him short by saying, "I'll go with you," and turned to get her sweater, for she was chilled to the bone by the cold night air, and didn't want her teeth chattering through the ordeal. Polly clung to her skirts then, wailing, "Don't leave me, Dody, I'm so scairt!" but Dora, fumbling her way to the divan and pushing Polly down on it, commanded her: "Do exactly as I tell you, Polly—lie here and pull the Indian blanket over your head, and don't make a sound till I come back. Not a sound—not a squeak!" and leaving her thus hidden, and drawing her sweater on as she went, she followed Olaf around the house.

Long strips of light from the kitchen windows gilded the ground, showing a ghostly looking saw-horse, piles of logs and split wood, a great litter of chips, above which loomed the dim outlines of the wagon. Beyond, everything lay in chill, mysterious darkness except for brief patches of pale moonlight dropping through the clouds here and there on the meadows. The scene in-

side the kitchen was brilliantly illuminated with three big reflector lamps on the walls. Opposite the window, Eric sat beside his mother, his head on her shoulder, his heel up on the table, her arm about him, her hand stroking his hair; in a low voice she was urging him soothingly to go to sleep. On the near side of the table with his back to her, Neil was rumbling away at his harangue, punctuating with his fist every time he came to "*Down* with the cap't'list! *Down* with Standard Oil!" At the end of the table, and not far from the outer door, Freddie rode a chair astride, clutching the back, which he had wrenched loose, and sang a ribald song, watching the others slyly for the effect.

"It's better'n I thought fer," whispered Olaf. "When I come out, Freddie was up close to Eric—I can tell him now without the others hearin'; and when I tell him, you come close to the winder and beckon him to come out. If he don't see y', he mebbe won't—he'll think I'm stringin' him."

For a moment she felt paralyzed—she couldn't do *that*; she had rather die than let him see her actually invite him to come! He would always believe she wanted him!—that miserable little cur! . . . Her gaze returned to her mother's face. Old, worn, anxious, alight with love; she had but one thought, one wish, one purpose—saving her boy, helping him out of this that he had brought on himself. In that swift moment of revelation the girl saw her mother as the incarnation of selfless devotion and felt ashamed of her own weakness.

Olaf was going on with his instructions: "If y' stand off to this side, yer mother and Eric can't see y', but Freddie can, soon's he looks. Then when he comes out, you walk over to the wagon where I got that rope layin' on the tongue. See? But if he tries to come

too close, you walk about among them chips—that'll tangle up his feet some. I know he ain't steady enough fer to chase y', but in case he should git too fresh, I fetched this here—" he held out a quirt which she took hardly thinking what she did. "If the dirty bugger tries fer to kiss y', hit him with all yer might acrost his dirty mouth."

"Tries—to—kiss—me!" she echoed incredulously, clinching her fist about the handle of the quirt.

"S-sh!" he warned. "I don't say he will—I only say if he does—er if he asts y' fer a kiss—*hit him!* Don't make no bones of it—lay him out flat in the dirt if he tries to put hands on y'. I know what them fellas is—them English remittance men—when they git to that state: *no* woman's safe. So you *hit him*. Aim fer his face, not his shoulder, er somewheres else. Keep yer left side towards him so's yer right hand'll be free to swing out, and so's he won't see y' gotta quirt. But if he grabs it and pulls it outa yer hand when y' do hit him, you run like the wolves was after y'—run into the house and holler fer me."

This last made her lips twitch into a thin smile, while her shoulders squared back and her muscles tightened. Her fighting blood was up as she told him, "I'm ready—send him out"; yet when, a moment later, Freddie came lurching out, singing her name, "Dora—why, er—Dora! My pretty Flora-Dora, Dora-Flora!" her heart stood still. "Why, there you are!—my Flora-Dora!"

She stepped away from the window but stood in a band of light that he might get a good look at her; make sure he had not been tricked, and answered: "Yes." He had stopped for just that purpose—to make sure it was she; and at her word he came nearer, slowly, leering and maudlin. "So it's really, truly—Dora! Flora-

Dora. . . . Flesh an' blood Dora—not a ghost of—Dora! White-robed Flora-Dora, not a hoax the Swede was playin' off on me when he said you're out here to mee' me by moonligh' alone, love! . . . I've been dreamin' an' waitin' for you, love; I've been longin' an' pinin' for you-oooo." He sang this last in a melancholy style, holding out his hands to her—a gesture meant to be appealing, but that she took otherwise. Her heart began beating furiously and she trembled, but she restrained the impulse to strike him, and moved off among the chips as Olaf had told her to, Freddie stumbling after, importuning her: "Oh, come with me, my swee' Flora-Dora—oh, come with your own true love. Come walk alone in the beau'f'l moonligh' . . . find a plaish where we can sit down . . . hol' hands in the moonligh'—a sof' plaish to si' down—" He tripped over a stick of firewood and went on all fours. "Damn! Oh, damn—excuse my damn, my Flora-Dora, it wasn't meant for you, but for thish—wha's thish?" He was feeling about on the ground among the chips, taking up handfuls of them and trying to see what they were, and in spite of her nervousness, she couldn't help smiling at the queer animal crawling about there in the fitful moonlight, and assuring her: "I'm lookin' for a sof' spot for my Flora-Dora to si' down on . . . make love . . . find a plaish fit for a queen in a minute . . . nice sof' girl, nice sof' spot. . . ."

Her attention was distracted from this outpouring by the sight of Olaf and her mother, partly lifting, partly pushing Eric to the bunk-house, her mother crooning: "Come, now, darlin'—come with mamma, come to bed like a good boy and get a good night's rest." Neil was lurching after them, but paused to appeal to the moon on behalf of the abused laboring man, calling it to witness that he'd surely down—down—down the

cap't'list and all 'ristocrats before morning, and that the magnates of the Standard Oil Company were doomed to perish in the flames.

While watching this, she stopped moving, and Freddie, reaching her unnoticed, suddenly laid hold of her ankle, telling her: "Beau'f'l queen, I kiss your foot——"

She jumped as if an adder had stung her, and sent him sprawling.

"Oh, beau'f'l queen!" he reproached gathering himself together and getting up on his knees, peering about from side to side in the darkness until he caught a gleam of her white skirt some distance off. "Ah, there you are! But why so coy? Queen o' my heart—I long have loved thee from afar . . . and where thou goest in the moonlight, there go I," with which he regained his feet and reeled in her direction while informing her: "I sought a sof' spot for thee to recline upon, beau'f'l queen . . . takes longer than I thought . . . too long to wait for kisses. . . . I need one from my Florida girly to 'courage my search for a sof' spot . . . must have one kiss from those ruby lips—" and he lunged at her to get it.

She lifted her arm, swung it free, and cut him across the face with her quirt. He crumpled up at her feet just as Olaf came hurrying from the bunk-house, calling her in a low voice: "Miss Feruseth! Where are you? . . . Oh—there. Where's the English pup?"

She pointed into the darkness. "I—I struck him." Her voice seemed to come from some one else. Now that she had done it—struck a man down into the dirt—she felt no longer the same self. Something had gone from her in that blow.

But Olaf was elated at her performance; admired it more than he had ever admired her for anything, and extolled: "Good fer you! He got his'n all right, all right!

Little runt! So he did make a try fer to kiss y' like I thought he might? Skunk!"

"Yes," she answered faintly. "Or I shouldn't have struck him. I—I did it in self-defense."

"Skunk! He'd ought to be killed! Hope he is! Serve him right." Olaf tested the limp form with his toe, and decided, after bending down and examining it: "Nope—he's more scairt than hurt."

"Is he—much hurt?" she quavered.

"I hope so—he'd ought to be, if y' give it to him way I told y' to: acrost the face with all yer might. But I don't guess he's damaged any to speak of—his legs and arms is all there still, ready to use if he gits the chancet. *Which he won't!*" He bent over and seized Freddie's hands. She saw then the gleam of rope lying out like a snake, humping and coiling as Olaf jerked it, looped and pulled and knotted it about ankles, knees, and wrists.

Between them, they carried Freddie, slung on a pole to the cow-shed and dumped him into an empty stall. He had made no resistance and uttered not a sound after he fell.

Once only she saw his face—as they passed through a pool of thin moonlight. And such a look! Staring eyes—a great red welt across his cheek; humiliation beyond words. He was sober then. It was that look she was always to remember when she thought of him, for she never saw him again.

CHAPTER XVII

THE hours that leave indelible impress upon the soul are those that prove to us our own impotence. Circumstances, however untoward or grievous, are with us but not of us until we pronounce the words, "It is my own powers that fail"; and the distilled essence of Dora's experience with her brother and Freddie Woodhull lay in that: it was she who had failed rather than they. All her youth under the influence of the Glynns, mother and daughter, gentlewomen of a passing era, she had had ingrained into her the belief so carefully cultivated under the mid-Victorian régime that any familiarity, levity, disrespect, or affront received by a woman she had only herself to blame for: she had permitted if not actually invited it: a man wouldn't "dare" unless a woman did. The woman who maintained her self-respect rigidly upon the terms, "man the seeker, woman the sought," was armored in some mystic, radiating quality of her own soul. But Dora's armor had failed to protect her; her good repute had not shielded her; that something that enfolds the chaste and honorable woman had proved inadequate when put to the test: because of her own impotence, two men had treated her like a hussy, and one was her own brother; yet what she said was: "I ought to have been too much above them for this to happen . . . and I wasn't!"

And then her mother! "But, mother, you gave Eric the whiskey." . . . "And I tell you, a man has to have it to sober up on." . . . It always came round to that in a circle no matter how they argued it, and with

her reply her mother always seemed to secure some intangible, yet invulnerable advantage. For with Dora, motherhood was a theory, largely moral; with her mother, an efflorescence of sentiment, and a scheme of concessions to the immediate; but beyond both there lay for the girl a *terra incognita*—the son—the man and his way in the world; and her mother had a neat trick of pushing the grounds of argument into the *terra incognita* and leaving Dora groping about with the feeling of avoiding—snakes! *Were* men so “entirely different”?—a race apart? Her mother declared they were—that Dora “didn’t know anything about them”—and that what was naturally expected of a girl like her, couldn’t be expected of a man like Eric except through a miracle of divine grace; and no matter what you expected or hoped when they were little boys—or when you married—allowances must always be made for the shortcomings of the best of men, and you must “remember that they weren’t women.” A very unpleasant revelation for Dora, this dual standard for the sexes, and one she rebelled against intellectually even more than morally. It meant two human worlds, touching briefly at the point of sex, but never really mingling their interest. Her own experience—and inexperience—with life rose up and denied it. There weren’t two chemistries, one for women, one for men; two geometries, histories, literatures, arts—there was *one* for both, equally. How then could there be two ethics, one for women, one for men?

“It’s simply that you train a boy in self-indulgence from the first, by letting him think he’s different,” she argued.

“He *is* different—I’ve had one to grow up, and I *know*,” returned her mother.

“Yes—he’s different *now*, because you started out

with the idea that he had to be different—in morals, so he took advantage of it. If a boy were brought up from the first to think he couldn't do such things as—last night—and still be considered decent by his mother or anybody, he wouldn't! He thinks it doesn't matter if he does it—you'll forgive him for what you wouldn't forgive a daughter. That's why!"

Her mother looked at her with a superior smile and had a touch of sarcasm in her voice as she replied: "No doubt!—if you could bring boys up your way! . . . But you can't, Dody—that's all there is to it—you can't, no matter how much you think you can. A boy begins to go his own way 'most soon's he's weaned—it's one o' the things a mother's got to learn to make the best of with 'em: to see her boy runnin' out about the place alone, leavin' her to work in the kitchen gettin' dinner for him. You don't know where he is or what he's doin' half the time. If you're a mother o' boys, you come to thank God on your knees every night when you got 'em safe in bed that they weren't brought home to you mangled, or killed by steers or wolves or coyotes."

Dora was momentarily silenced by the weight of experience against her, but presently retorted: "Then it seems to me you ought to *try harder* with boys, if that's the way of it. I still think it's a matter of training."

"A boy's born so—as you'll find out when you have one."

Her mother sighed at the hopelessness of making a maiden daughter understand, but added for Eric's sake: "You simply got to make the best of what they are and wait in patience till they outgrow their wild ways. Early or late, a man's bound to have his fling—there ain't one in a million that don't, and it's better to have it over and done with while he's young. But if you don't treat 'em gentle while they're havin' it,

they go off and leave you for good—that's all there is to that, in case you don't realize it!—they *leave you*—mother or wife—they leave you, and there you are, alone! So as for givin' him the whiskey to sober up on—a man has to have it. . . . But why argue it, Dody?" she asked plaintively. "We been over and over it—I see it my way, knowin' boys and men—you see it your way, not knowin' boys and men—so we don't get anywheres in the end."

"Quite true," Dora agreed coldly, and her mother visibly brightened up.

"Now he's home at last, you'll be able to use your influence with him to save him from worse," said she. "You can begin to educate him in book study—give him your advantages. With Polly and him comin' to school to you all winter—and all the books you got and that pretty room to attract him——"

Mrs. Feruseth was so enchanted at the picture that she didn't observe her daughter's face. On one point the girl had taken a stand: after Eric's treatment of her, he should never cross the sill of her study again at her invitation; brother or no brother, he had forfeited every right to her consideration in that. And as for tutoring him!—she felt that something in her soul had sagged: she couldn't, literally *couldn't* do anything for him. Up to then she had thought her powers were there, but inoperative: she had powers if she could bring them to play; weapons and ammunition for any emergency if she could see where to aim. But that other thing—the citadel—within which the gentlewoman feels herself ensconced, inviolate—mud had been flung on her through its very walls! Oh, no—she would not teach Eric anything—she was through with Eric! She had not told her mother what had happened in there, nor had he, and it was the last touch of irony

to listen to her maundering on about a sister's sweet influence and the saving power of book learning. Indeed, the whole irony of the situation, when all was said and done, lay in her mother. The prospect of having Eric home for the winter rather frightened her. He had changed, she didn't know how; but she knew she couldn't manage him any more, and if Dora couldn't! . . . Heaven pity them when they were snowed in like rabbits in a warren! She was pleading for all of them as she urged, "You must use all your influence now, Dody darlin', to make a good man of him—make him take the pledge. I'm sorry you saw him that way—I tried to warn you and didn't get the chance—but you'll remember that a man in liquor's not responsible—you must make allowances. When he's himself there ain't a dearer, kinder boy in the State, and under your influence he'll be himself again," and so on and so on, trying to force the responsibility home.

Dora disagreed with her upon everything she had put forth on Eric and boys and men, and yet kept wondering if her mother were right after all: that there were two worlds, one for women and one for men! If she couldn't hold Eric up to her standards, what about Freddie Woodhull? On *his* standards—he had been fairly decent! She preferred to think he had disgustingly insulted her. At any rate, here was where her standards *ruled*, and she proved that there was only one decency for both sexes by dismissing Freddie forthwith—wrote him a check for wages to date and sent it out to him in the cow-shed by Olaf. And she didn't consult her mother about it, either. That was a plain-sailing case for action without weighings and psychologizings. Her mother didn't even know it until, happening to step to the door to call Polly, she saw him going away in the buggy with his Gladstone bags piled up behind,

and hurried off to Dora to know why, and heard from her lips: "Because I can't permit him to stay here."

"You sent him off? Why, Dody! You sent him off without a word to me? For what? For what he did last night?"

"Yes. I can't have a man like that on the ranch."

For one brief moment her mother experienced a resurrection of her old opposition, and was framing a retort embodying "high-handed dealings," and "my house," when she remembered that there was "trouble enough afoot without going after it a-horseback," so she contented herself with a mild "Poor Freddie! He means well. It does seem a little hard he should have to lose his place at the beginning of winter just for one night's frolic. I don't mean to criticise you, darlin'—you're the one to say, of course, who shall go; but wasn't you a wee mite hasty? Couldn't you just as well let him have another chance . . . and saved all the talk among the neighbors?"

"No. I couldn't."

"He's always been right-actin' on the ranch before—gone away for his spree, and come back straight and stayed straight till his next remittance——"

"I can't have that sort of men on the ranch at all."

"Well, of course you know best; but couldn't you of made a little allowance for a first offense, considering . . . how Eric give him the liquor and encouraged him to drink here?"

"No. I couldn't." She saw the prick of her mother's conscience in the question and inwardly commented: "Considering Eric's mother gave *him* the liquor and encouraged *him* to drink here!"

"It seems pretty hard," sighed her mother. "Freddie wasn't no worse than Neil, and you ain't sendin' Neil off, too, are you?"

"No."

"Then Freddie'll feel it ain't fair—Neil had ought to be sent off if he is—and it'll make a lot of talk among the neighbors. If you'd consulted me first, I'd have advised against it."

"Do you mean that Neil sang nasty songs before Polly, too?" demanded Dora, ready to slaughter him also if her mother said yes.

But her mother was already hazy on everything that had been said or sung—her fears of fire and bloodshed had swamped such trivialities; she could only recall that Neil had "preached rights," adding, "But Polly didn't understand anything that was said by anybody, so I don't see why—" on which Dora cut her off with a sharp "When a man feels free to sing ribald songs before a little girl, off he goes from this ranch while I'm running it!" and shut her mouth like a steel trap. She looked at her mother through narrowing lids, thinking: "I suppose you would still go on 'making allowances' if you knew what he said to me—and tried to do!" In which she did her mother scant justice. For, at bottom, her mother was quite as mid-Victorian as herself on liberties and insults; but motherhood had mellowed her into an easy-going, impersonal way of taking such freedoms of speech as boys and men allowed themselves before her. She would have gone into a rage had she known what Freddie said, but hadn't a suspicion that any man would dare a hint, much less an attempt to kiss Dora, and asked with all innocence: "What did you say to him when you sent him off? What explanation did you make him?"

"None at all. I didn't see him." And Dora turned on her heel and went to her room, saying under her breath: "How she pesters!"

The sending had been accomplished through Olaf,

very simply: she wrote a check and gave the order of deportation. Olaf, full of joy and importance, rooted Freddie out of the straw in the cow-stall, untied his ropes, and informed him: "Y' got half an hour fer to git off'n the ranch. I'm to drive y' to the post-office. Here—" and he thrust the envelope into Freddie's hand.

Freddie tore it open with trembling fingers, found his check, and swore. He knew things had been "pretty rotten," but not as bad as all that—sent off without a word! He remembered how he had tried to kiss the girl and had been struck down, but he thought she would let it go at that; it was certainly enough! He had been lying there in the dim light planning a grovelling apology—one that would show her he was still a gentleman. He felt a deep inner need to right himself in her eyes, for that blow from her hand had struck him lower, not merely physically, but morally and spiritually, than anything that had ever happened to him; and now her silent contempt took from him the last rag of self-respect he was trying to save by an apology that would win back a tiny rag of her respect for him. She would know by his apology he had some decency left—he wasn't utterly a cad; none of those other muckers would dream of apologizing if they had done what he had done—that was how she would appreciate the difference between them and him in spite of everything. . . . He *would* see her and tell her how sorry he was—she had no right to take that gentleman's right from him, and she shouldn't! . . . He looked up to meet Olaf's gloating eyes and hear: "Miss Feruseth said fer to tell y' that if y' didn't care fer to mention last night, an' how y' come by that there welt on yer face, why she wouldn't, ner nobody else. I'm the only one 'sides her knows, an' I won't; so if y'll take my advice, y'll cut out the

affectionate good-bys all round an' pack yer biled shirts. I'll be hooked up in 'bout fifteen minutes—that had ought to give y' time."

Freddie nodded. Perhaps it was better so; for her silent eyes would accuse not him only, but his class, his race, and he would not have to see it. He had one defense left and he used it: "Tell her, please," he said humbly, "that I can only apologize for what happened—I don't try to excuse it—it was inexcusable—but I apologize; and tell her I should have left to-day of my own accord out of regard for her feelings, even if she had not dismissed me." Thus, he saved his little rag of self-respect.

"Sour grapes!" grunted Olaf, and went off to hook up his team. The more he chewed the cud of reflection over the affair, the richer became the extracted juice. "*Now* Miss Feruseth'll know who's the *man* about here!—one she can always rely on—and her friend," and the more he admired her and thrilled. Olaf was the only perfectly happy person on the ranch that day—he felt *so* successful!

And—he was the one reliable spot left clean in Dora's little world! She saw her mother "simply hopeless" when it came to demanding anything like moral backbone from her incorrigible indulgence: mother had to be taken as she was, or not at all. . . . Freddie Woodhull. . . . Dora decided never to think of him again—his was a tale that was told and *finis* written with a check. . . . But Eric! If it weren't for Eric . . . always Eric—Eric—Eric at every turn of the way for the whole family! Oh, had her father known what he was doing when he left her Eric? If he had, it was cruel! . . . No, she mustn't say that—it wasn't loyal to him from the only soul that had ever understood his soul. . . . But, knowing or not knowing, think of its

having happened to her!—that she should have been made guardian to such a brutal, dishonorable young tough!

By morning, her repugnances and her puritanical scorn for sin and dishonor, and her feeling over the other events of the night had overshadowed the pity she had felt for him. Except for the sickening glimpse she had had of him through the window, she had not seen him, and didn't want to, ever again, she told herself—and knew there was no way out of it, for he was back in his own bed sobering up, waited on hand and foot by his mother, who seemed to be—*enjoying it*, if you please! “What *are* mothers made of?” thought Dora. “Well, father was right on one thing—love isn't all! You've got to have moral backbone if you're going to make anything out of your Erics and Pollys.” And Dora immediately gave her mother a sample of moral backbone by demanding every drop of liquor in the house—two bottles that she still had hidden in the corner behind the flour-barrel—and smashing them to smithereens, pushing the scrap down into a gopher-hole. Smash—smash—smash!—her spirits rose with each smash as she hurled a stone down at a piece of glass. Here was tangible moral progress; forcible grip on circumstances. “I'm running this ranch!” cried she, “and there are some things that can't be done here!” (Smash!) “This is one—drinking!” (Smash!) “And the sooner they all find it out, the better for them!” (Smash!) “It will teach them who's running this ranch—and how.” (Smash!) “I may not be able to bust broncos, but I can—bust *whiskey-bottles*!” (Smash!)

Her eyes flashed, the blood coursed through her veins; the keen wind searched her thin clothing and set her a-tingle, blowing a stray lock of dark hair across her eyes, which she threw back with the gesture of a

young mustang shaking its mane. Above her hung the cool cobalt sky, already rippled with clouds. Action—her forceful grip on sudden events—her certitude of right in what she was then doing—the lovely day, all conspired to cleanse her of the feeling of smirch left on her by Freddie, and he was gone because she had said, without consulting anybody, the effective *Go!* It was the first time she had ever said anything like that, and now, looked at through the wind and across the broken whiskey-bottles, it was immensely stimulating! As she returned swiftly to the house, her mother thought, "How handsome she is! I wonder she wasn't snapped up by some man long ago!" and then sighed at her plaintively: "Dollar-and-half liquor, Dody—I sent to Denver for it years ago. It might at least have done somebody good that's sick and needs it."

"What about the harm?" questioned Dora.

"Harm? There wouldn't of been any—in just keep-in' it hid away. You could of hid it—in your room behind some books—nobody'd of suspected, and it would of been there in case somebody really needed it. . . . I've always kep' it in the house; you can't tell, in a country like this, when there'll be accidents—men overcome with the cold—it's well to be on the safe side—have a remedy you can lay your hands on quick, and if you keep it hid——"

"Did my father use liquor?" It was a home thrust, and at once her mother bridled: "He never touched a drop in his life, but once! And then you couldn't rightly say he took it. He was caught in an August blizzard when he was out on the range with the sheep—tried to bring the sheep home. The two men I sent out—Olaf was one—found him near frozen to death, and poured a flaskful into him to revive him. But it was me gave Olaf the whiskey—I had it here ready

for just such an emergency!" she added proudly. "My foresight—that was what saved your father then! It's why I don't like to see good liquor thrown out on the ground—there's life-and-death times when you got nothing else to depend on. . . . And there's times when men need it to sober up on, and if Eric don't get a nip, what I'm afraid of is, he'll go off to Rock River, and get hold of some of that tarantula soup, and then what? You don't know what that poison stuff is they sell there, or how it eats the insides out of 'em—makes 'em fair crazy. And a man that's sobering up, he's bound to get—something; he can't stand the gnawin'."

"He will get something—*black coffee!*" flashed Dora. "Have you tried that?"

"How can you be so heartless!"

"Black coffee is an excellent remedy, I've heard—pour him full of that to sober up on."

"I declare, you seem to have no sympathy for sickness and suffering! I don't know where you get it from—not from *me!*"

"Black coffee—is what the doctor ordered."

"The doctor?"

"I'm the doctor now. The prescription reads: '*Black coffee* for Eric.'"

Her mother sniffed, but set about making it, thinking as she did so, "She's changed, too! First Eric ugly to his mother and carrying on; now Dody talking back to me like that! They never acted so before in their lives—I don't know what's got into them all at once—or what they'll be doing next, either one of them, if it keeps on like this," and she sighed, knowing they were "getting beyond" her, but not willing to acknowledge it, or seeing why it should suddenly be so.

She didn't realize that maturity was dawning for both of them. Vaguely, gropingly, they were both

knitting up lines of action with their inner forces of will and control. Out of their chaos of inexperience, untried plans, untested strengths, likes, dislikes, wishes, hopes, fears, repugnances, concerted effort was developing; new attitudes were forming; the powers of domination and mastery of circumstance were coming to birth within them, and these two, standing at the threshold of manhood and womanhood, were entering upon a hidden drama, as unsuspected by themselves as by her, in which the soul of one was to serve as the developing bath to the soul of the other, bringing out to clearer and clearer view the inmost fabric of their heredity, the warring elements of attitude and ideal from all the generations back of each—a drama of new souls, rising from the ashes of youth's selfishness. All their mother saw was a hard, unsympathetic, unyielding, cold, white girl, "perfectly heartless," and flippantly ordering or depriving a poor, dear, sick, misunderstood, well-meaning, affectionate boy, whose peremptory "Mom! . . . Mom! . . . *Here!*" took her flying to his bedside, where she communicated as soon as she had kissed him and he had asked her for a "little nip": "Darlin', there ain't one single, solitary drop left in the house for you—Dora took away what I was savin' up and smashed it out on the ground!—two bottles of dollar-and-a-half brandy been in the house five years, that might have done somebody good even if she didn't want it herself!"

He grunted—that was all the satisfaction she got; then he ordered her: "Well then, gimme some black coffee if y' ain't got nothin' else—I got to have somethin'; an' tell Polly to *shut up!* She woke me up—she's round here to this side the house, singin' an' callyhootin' like they wasn't nobody on earth but herself. . . . 'Zif this gnawin' in muh insides, an' this pain I got in muh

head wasn't enough without her splittin' me clean open with her callyhoots. . . . Listen to that! . . . 'Zif nobody cared how I felt. . . . Gimme the coffee an' tell her to go chase herself—this ain't no time fer her to be singin'. Hear that dog—she's makin' him do it! Why couldn't y' tell her before I ast . . . sh'd think y'd know—fella sick as I am . . . can't have his head slit open more'n what it is. . . ."

She soothed him fondly, "Yes, darlin'—I'll have the coffee in a minute—I set the pot on the range as I come in," and going to the window beckoned Polly. There was a whispered admonition during which Polly pulled herself up on the sill and stared within, protesting loudly she didn't make the dog bark—he barked 'cos he was happy, an' he didn't know whether Eric was cross or not; and Eric muttered: "Cross, the hell! Guess you'd be cross." When his mother returned to his bed and asked if there were anything else she could get him, he snapped: "No, there ain't . . . only to leave me be quiet an' go to sleep . . . an' not think. Can't y' make some allowances fer a fella—when he's this way? I ain't cross—I'm *sick* . . . thought *you'd* care a little bit fer me. . . ."

How she melted! She brought his coffee, and then trotted back to the kitchen to make chicken stew for his dinner—a work of art in quarts of cream-thickened gravy swimming with raised dumplings, cut-up hard-boiled eggs, and tapioca. Presently she was humming to herself a crooning Irish cradle-song she had sung him to sleep with as a baby. She had her boy again, *needing her*. The rest didn't matter.

Eric was right in telling his mother he didn't want to think, but once he was awake, he had to, for life was one grand gloom in which everything "turned out

wrong." He could remember pretty clearly what had happened from the time he started off from Addie's, primed to "be slick," until he shambled out of Dora's study into the kitchen, demanding of his mother, "Gimme a drink o' whiskey, quick!" in a way that made her hastily produce it without remonstrance or argument. After that, things grew vaguer until all became blank and here he was in his bed, sick and wishing he could die, so he wouldn't have to face either Dora or Addie again. He didn't know which he dreaded more, Dora's cold contempt, or Addie's hot jeers, for all he had to offer to either by way of placation was to say he wished he hadn't done it. But what *made him do it* he couldn't explain, and that seemed the most important part; until he could, he hadn't a case. So he lay there mumbling to himself: "Wisht I hadn't done it—dunno what got into me," over and over as the underlying refrain of his other meditations. Could Dora have looked within him then she would have had one of the greatest surprises of her life; for while she was crying out against him, "What a dreadful thing—what a *sin*!" the poor boy didn't know he had sinned! Murder was a sin, and stealing and cattle-rustling, and lying—sometimes; there in his crude code, sin ended; after that, there was a large boggy region where you "didn't do jes' right, wisht y' hadn't done it, an' wouldn't do it again" to wade through before you came to the secure ground of right, where lay the things you were proud of and could brag about to everybody, supposing you were the bragging sort. In that middle region he was now floundering in his efforts to orient himself—floundering slowly but surely to the ground marked SIN on the moral map.

But out of the chaos of his mind two figures rose clearer and clearer—Addie and Dora. They clashed at every turn. It was Addie who went down in his opinion.

. . . If it hadn't been fer Addie, why damn, none of it wouldn't never have happened, that's what! It was *her* put him up to tryin' fer to git something on Dora, an' got *him* into all this trouble. Addie, she *knew too much*, that's what. A girl can know *too much* fer her own good an' everybody else's, if she knows what ain't so, an' eggs a fella on to doin' things he wisht he hadn't. Thought her an' him was friends. Looks like it, don't it? Tell her one thing—she'd saw the last of him fer quite some time—had enough o' gittin' into trouble with his sister—his guardeen could cut him off if she'd a mind-ta . . . if she was mad enough at him fer snatchin' the letter . . . mebbe she was, fer she'd not come near him even to ask how he was. . . . Mad as hornets, mebbe. Wisht he hadn't done it—but Addie was the one to blame. . . . House was awful quiet—y'd think the whole family was dead; even Polly didn't care enough fer to come an' see if he wanted anything. . . . *Nobody* cared how sick he was—he might die an' they not know it till they found him stiff in his bed. . . . Then they'd feel sorry—

After a couple of hours of these maunderings during which his head cleared and his gloom and loneliness became insupportable, he bellowed: "Mom! . . . Mom! . . . Here!" and brought her running back, love and fright illumining her face, exclaiming: "What's happened, darlin'? Are you feeling worse?"

"I'm feelin' awful—I dunno what'sa matter with me . . . muh head ain't right. What're y' doin' that y' ain't been near me all day?"

"I'm getting dinner. . . . But you said, darlin', that you wanted to sleep. I thought you didn't want me in here, so I stayed out."

"Aw, mom', how y' talk! I *always* want y' when I'm sick—sh'd think y' know it by this time, an' y'd ought

to make some allowances fer me bein'—cross. . . . I didn't mean fer y' to go off an' stay away—a *week*."

She stroked his tousled yellow curls off his forehead, smiling down at him, her heart overflowing, and thinking: "Oh, why couldn't Dody have been a little more like him?"

"What's Polly doin'?" he demanded.

"Helping me in the kitchen."

"Huh! In the house—an' never come near me—to see if I wanted anything—drinka water."

"She was afraid of disturbin' you, darlin'. She wanted to come, but I said no." A white lie she knew the recording angel would forgive—for Polly's sake.

"Huh. 'Twouldn'ta hurt her if she had disturbed me—I mighta been needin' a drinka water—how'd she know if she didn't come? . . . What's Dora doin'?"

"I suppose she's studyin'—she's in her room."

"Whaddid she say—'bout me?"

"She said to make you some nice fresh coffee."

"Much obliged, I'm sure—considerin' . . . But whaddid she tell y' . . . 'bout yestiddy?"

His mother pricked up her ears. "Tell me? She's told me nothing at all. Was there anything to tell?"

"How do I know? It's what I ast you?" he replied, and began to sulk. What a girl! Keep her mouth shut an' not tell her own mother so's a fella could find out how he stood with her 'fore he saw her! . . . Mebbe she wasn't really mad after all—if she didn't care enough 'bout it to tell her mother! Anyway, better leave her to do the tellin'—then she couldn't call him no tattle-tale. . . . With this wise resolve he was about to switch conversation afield, but his mother got in ahead of him. "I don't know even yet what happened in her room that made you come out the way you did—fairly stamping for a drink."

"I—I broke one of her cups—knocked it off when I went to reach a match, that's what. . . . Thought mebbe she'd got a grouch on me fer it." He felt proud of himself for that evasion, and more so when he saw how easily his mother swallowed it.

"Why, did you? One of her little set on the tea-table she brought from college? What a pity—she thought so much of them! But if 'twas an accident, she's too well bred to make a fuss, or lay it up against you; you ought to know that."

"One o' them whatcher call holy white *parrygons*," he snorted, and immediately relapsed into gloom.

His mother watched him for some moments in puzzled silence, wondering what she had said to put him out, and then reminded him it was time to get up and dress for dinner, if he were well enough to get up; on which he wasn't well enough, and "didn't want no dinner—didn't want nothin' but to go to sleep an' be left alone."

She told him she was glad he wasn't trying to get up—rest would do him the most good of anything; and pictured herself feeding him that delicious, creamy, tapioca-dotted gravy from a spoon; on which he immediately decided to get up and demanded his clothes.

She trotted after them and brought them in from the line. She had washed his underclothes and flannel shirt, and they were wind-sweet and sun-warmed as she laid them out on his bed. He sat on the edge of it swinging his feet and kicking his toes into the antelope rug beside it, grumbling: "Them flannels has all shrunk up—I can't hardly git 'em on—bust 'em to pieces if I try."

"'Tain't the flannels—they ain't shrunk any to speak of—it's you growin' so, darlin'," said she proudly. "You're beginnin' to fill out. Feel how broad your shoulders has got this last summer! 'Most broad as

Olaf's—and you're better formed than him—you ain't got that clumsy look."

This cheered him amazingly, though he went on muttering, while holding the undershirt against himself: "Musta shrunk some, anyways—fitted me two weeks ago—'tain't much too big fer Polly now. . . . Don't b'lieve I'll ever git into it without y' cut it up the back."

"Better let me help you get it over your head."

"Aw—nemmind . . . I'll git her on, if I hafta cut her open back an' front." He felt himself swelling to manhood rapidly. How good it was to be so big and strong!

With a deft motion she shelled off his pajama jacket, and telling him, "Hold up your arms, pet," thrust them into the sleeves of the undershirt as if he had been a small boy. He laughed aloud, "Ho-ho!" as his head came through the opening; he let his arms fall on her shoulders, burrowing his face in her neck, whispering, "Oh, mommsie, mommsie!" The comfort of her! It soothed him like a warm bath; spread all over him. "Dear ole mommsie—sweetest mommsie in the world! Don't mind when I git grouchy—they ain't only one mommsie fer me."

She clasped him to her, her heart so overflowing she almost cried. "There's only one son for me," she whispered. He felt so melted all at once he was just about to pour out the whole Dora episode and ask what he had better do about it, when he spied Polly pushing open the door and peeking in. The golden moment fled—as such moments always did when Polly's stare was turned on them.

"Whadda y' doin' here?" he barked at her.

"I—I thought dinner was ready," she stammered.

"In my room? I guess so. I s'pose y' smelt it cook-

in'—on the foot o' my bed. Huh! Any excuse does fer you—when y' wanta snoop."

"I smelt something *burning* in here—so I s'pose I took it fer dinner cookin'," returned Polly, with apparent artlessness that drew "What?" from him.

"I guess it musta been yer mattress afire: yer *temper's* hot enough fer to fry a steer. Phew!" With which shot, she slammed the door and flitted off.

He turned his bark on his mother: "It's a pity y' can't learn Polly some manners—*always* snoopin' in where she ain't wanted—peekin' in now to see me dressin'. She's one reason I hate to stay home, if y' wanta know . . . ten-year-old girl runnin' over a man like he was a—door-mat! Wouldn't nobody stand fer it. . . . This thing 'bout Polly stickin' herself in everywheres with grown-ups like she's one of 'em has gone so fer folks is talkin' 'bout it. Can't nobody come into the house, but up she gits right 'front of 'em an' stares an' stares like she's idiotic, that's what. . . . Why Dora herself, she had to go build a room fer to keep Polly off'n her! My Gawd! An' you leave her do it—never say a word to her—never learn her it ain't the thing to do—an' then you wonder why I don't come home an' stay home, an' blame it . . . on Addie! Well, y' can blame the right one after this—now y' know; an' remember one reason I don't stay home: *I ain't no child's nurse.*"

She felt as if he had struck her; then she was bewildered. What did it really mean: Dora down on Polly; now Eric, and "folks were talking." Addie was the only one who had "talked," but the shot went home. It seemed as if some invisible Nemesis were in pursuit of the child, depriving her of her rightful pleasures, driving her out from the companionship of humankind. And why was it, that just when the world was

gladness and satisfaction, everything turned in a single second to gall and bitterness? His mother was too deeply wounded to reply, and turned and left him.

Eric, deciding ten times he wouldn't, decided eleven times he would go out to dinner, and came shambling to his place after the others were seated and flopped down with the feeling that he had more legs than belonged to him. Dora greeted him with casual politeness and he replied in kind. At once a shamefaced air began to brood over the table, and everybody but Polly felt uncomfortable. Polly was delightfully excited. Not since she could remember had so many unsolved mysteries floated in the social atmosphere—yesterday's doings, Freddie's departure without explanation, and now the very fact of Eric's being so horrid to her betokened a secret surprised in the act of telling. Things were "awful queer"—much too delightfully queer to miss by a tantrum with Eric—particularly as she had gotten the better of him; so she gave him a hearty "Hello, Eric!" when he sat down, and began staring.

He nodded without looking at her, turned up his plate, and held it out to his mother with a curt: "Only some gravy."

She gave him a liberal supply; then the chicken livers and a choice piece of breast she had saved for Polly in case he didn't come; seeing which, he growled: "I said I only wanted some gravy."

"Then leave what you don't want," she told him coldly.

He waited a moment to see if she would take the meat off, set his plate in front of him, whistled for the dog, and picking the livers and breast up in his fingers, dropped the pieces into the dog's smiling mouth, casting

defiant glances about the table as he did so. Then spearing two large slices of bread, he began tearing off pieces, sopping them in the gravy and sucking it off with noises that Polly thought a hog ought to be ashamed of. Since nobody corrected him, she would—for the sake of the chicken-livers denied her, and for other things as well.

"Eric, you must *not* dip up and slobber."

He glowered into his plate.

"It ain't manners."

"Manners—you talk *manners*!" he flared at her viciously. "Set there an' stare at a man till he can't swaller his food, an' talk manners! Stare like y' grudged every mouthful I et—an' talk manners! Here—take it an' eat it yerself, if that's what yer after!" and he shoved his plate toward her and his chair away from the table, and rose delivering this parting shot: "When it comes to so much manners a man can't eat, drink, er sleep in his own home, it's time he quit an' went where he could. Good-by—to *such* manners! I'm through with 'em—through with bein' treated like a boy!" And he stalked out and off to the corrals to get his horse and go. . . . Go back to Addie—*she* let him do as he pleased and never said a word about manners, ner anything else. . . . Show some folks how they *couldn't* treat him, no matter what he done—couldn't make him over to suit themselves. There they all set, slick an' superior, lookin' down on him, jes' 'cause he got drunk last night—had good an' plenty o' reason fer it, too. . . . Mom' didn't care, but Dora—mad as hops an' sittin' there like a frozen marble angel. . . .

"What *right's* she got to look down on me fer anything I'd like to know?" he demanded of the landscape in general. "She'd ought of showed me papa's letter first time when I ast her—she's got nobody but herself

to blame if I read it. But that don't give her no right to look down on me—me takin' a little too much don't give her no right, neither. I gotta right to take a drink when I feel like it—I'm good as anybody, I guess—this is a free country! I'll show 'em how much *rights* they got to criticise me fer what I gotta right to do."

This is the subtle virus of every democracy proclaiming men free and equal and laying it down that there is but one class for all: the ideal remains perpetually outside, challenging, and the common herd has nothing to meet it with but the claim of brute "rights" that would drag everything to its own dead level of mediocrity. To scorn superiority, and yet himself remain scorn-exempt for his own shortcomings is the proletarian's "ideal" of society, and his panacea for its existent ills from which he thinks himself "suffering." Acknowledge his "right" to be taken everywhere on his own terms, and the Golden Age is here!

These thoughts of rights and equality had been vaguely floating about in Eric for some time, and Polly's word "manners" fell on him like a live coal, burning first, then gradually setting fire to him in a way that illuminated the whole family situation and gave it new meanings. He had just as much *right* in the home as anybody—his mother had impressed that on him—but here was his sister setting herself up, a marble angel for all the rest to pattern by, and looking down on him when he didn't! Of course, she was still mad at him about the letter—though she had no real right to be mad for he had a right to know if his father had left him anything, or what his secret directions were—but that wasn't all—she had always looked down on him, from the first minute she ever saw him—he could see that now, plain as anything: *looked down on*, that was the word! . . . And what's more, she had

taught Polly to, and soon it would be his mother . . . then everybody.

"Much *home* it is," he growled bitterly, "where a fella's gotta be *looked down on* fer every little thing he does, that he's gotta right to do! Well, it shows me where I'm at, anyways! Show 'em where they're at, too: they gotta come down off'n *their* high horse if they want *me* to stay home! I'll go, that's what."

Hatless and coatless, he was chilled to the bone when he reached the corrals. The morning wind had fallen, turning raw and damp; low, leaden clouds hung packed from horizon to horizon. He smelt snow in the air, and advised himself to hurry away before it began to fall. But he couldn't ride over the plains the way he was, and started back to the house for his outer clothing, and saw Neil and Olaf clumping along toward him. His declaration of independence required that he disappear and leave no clew, so he dodged into the cow-shed and hid in a stall, burrowed under the hay, to wait till they were out of sight and hearing; but they potted about with endless chores for what seemed endless hours before their mumblings and rumblings died away. Stiff, shivering, sick, he crept out blinking at the light, slunk around in a wide *détour* of the house that brought him opposite his window, ran for it, and climbed in. Still he didn't take his hat and coat and go, as he had promised himself he would—he sank dejectedly on his bed pulling a quilt about his shoulders "to warm up first." Big tears of self-pity and general misery welled up, blinding him; tears, too, of rebellion against an intangible something in his sister he couldn't name or meet—a something that subtly dominated and held him in spite of everything. He let his tears flow into his pillow, asserting, "She's got no right to look down on me—she hadn't no right to keep papa's letter from me—I got as much

rights here as she has," and all the while there kept tinkling through his mind like a brook hidden by willows: "I don't see why she couldn't like me a little bit—when I'm her brother."

CHAPTER XVIII

WINTER came, white-footed and still in the night, with what Polly called a "dear little baby snow-storm," and Dora called a blizzard.

"This—a *blizzard*?" corrected Polly, with gracious contempt. "Wait till y' see a Wyoming blizzard! Snow-storms, y' can go sleddin' an' stay *out*; blizzards, y' gotta stay *in* till yer dug out—that's the diff'runce. Wait till y' see the snow piled up on the west end higher'n the roof—wait till y' see Antelope Basin snowed level clean acrost—wait till y' see the Garlock snowed clean *under*, all but the chimbley stickin' up outa the snow, an' the folks inside 'most smothered to death, an' nobody wouldn't have found 'em last winter if they hadn't of saw the chimbley an' went on snow-shoes an' dug 'em out an' saved their lives—*that's* a *blizzard*. This ain't only a teenty-weenty baby snow-storm. Come on out!"

Still it was snow enough to keep Eric at home; it was winter and the task of living through it had begun. So Polly had to go to school forthwith, three hours every morning in the study, which she described as "lots of fun" while the novelty lasted.

Dora now flung herself on Polly's little mind as if all their lives depended on its being crammed with information; but once she had buckled to the task of making something out of that little mind, she discovered what a very little mind it was. Intelligent, eager, inquisitive, shallow, careless, indolent, inconsequent—her mother writ small and undisciplined. Polly was interested only so long as Dora kept pumping interest in

from the outside; with the least difficulty, interest and effort flattened out and died together. Reading came with misleading ease, as always with such children, convincing doting parents that their offspring are prodigies of intellect and natural brilliancy; but arithmetic was beyond her; she didn't like it—couldn't understand it—was too indolent to try—and her mother told her it "wasn't any use to a girl, anyway." When Dora inquired, "Have you corrected those examples you got wrong?" Polly was in the habit of replying through a yawn: "No-o-ope! It was too much trouble. If I can't gettum right the first time, I can't gettum right a-tall."

"Of course you can—if you try."

"I did try—an' gottum wrong."

"Try again, and get them *right*. . . . Come, come, Polly—brace up! Don't lie down in your tracks for every trifling difficulty—take hold and conquer your task like a man!"

"Well, if it'll please you . . . I'll try again . . . if y'll show me how. I don't remember whether I borrowed er carried—which had I ought of? Tell me that, an' I guess I can do 'em . . . mebbe. . . . Wait till after supper—Eric'll help me."

Progress at that rate was distressingly slow, and at the end of a few weeks seemed altogether to cease. Dora laid the blame largely on her own inexperience as a teacher, but partly on Polly's habits and the general family situation. Eric had to be entertained in the evening with games and romps, often till midnight, and Polly was either too nervous or too sleepy next day to give herself to anything so unsocially useless as borrowing an' carrying, to say nothing of the stoopid ole mul'pication table. Why should anybody? So much more fun playin' ole maid an' checkers.

Dora never took part in these festivities. Aside from the fact that she couldn't think of a word to say to Eric, or he to her, she abhorred family evenings more than she had ever done. With Freddie gone, and Eric home, the other men had simply taken possession of the kitchen as their rightful and delightful rallying-ground, and it was soon a superheated haze of rank pipe smoke and, as Dora thought, ranker amusements, everybody cracking nuts, biting and crunching apples—a sound that made her blood run cold as it does most people of sensitive nervous responses—playing games of some sort, Polly and Eric teasing each other, Eric growing crosser and Polly perter as the evening wore on, and their mother dropping perpetual oil on troubled waters between them, by admonishing him: “How can you be so cross with the poor child—child with so few pleasures! Her sayin’ where to move your checkers don’t hurt you—you don’t have to do it; she never put her finger on the board, and so long’s she don’t touch anything, you got no cause for complaint. I don’t know what’s got into you lately, Eric—you used to be so kind to Polly—so patient and loving.”

Mrs. Feruseth by this time had a rather curious problem on her hands: Having tried with indifferent success all summer to make Dora “swallow” Polly, she was now trying to make Eric do it, and Dora “swallow” Eric, and Polly “swallow” both her and Dora! For under the contagion of Eric’s grouchy refusals to “swallow” his mother’s suggestions about himself and his doings—or “swallow” anything he didn’t feel like “swallowing”—Polly’s little inner life was going through an upheaval: *she* wouldn’t “swallow” anything, either! Thus she grew perter and perter, a certain impishness and meanness coming to the surface she had never shown before; and after a month of Eric, Dora apparently saw

all she had gained with Polly, taught her and trained her in, swept away, and another child, an insufferable little nuisance, taking her place. Her mother seemed to notice nothing; Dora called it "tragic," and spent hours alone agonizing over this new complication, more and more convinced that no girl *ever* was so utterly alone in the universe to bungle through. She had none of what William James calls "the theosophizing conceit and hide-bound confidence in the upshot of things which vulgarly optimistic minds display," and thus the further she went on, the more clearly she saw failure, proved and inevitable, past, present, and to come, staring at her. What she couldn't see was the changes going on silently within the souls under her influence; she couldn't even believe enough in her influence by that time to expect it to accomplish anything with a young man like Eric—after what he had done—whatever she had once hoped to accomplish with a child like Polly. And what none of the family saw, was that vaguely, persistently, almost subconsciously, they were testing Dora out for the moral fabric in souls that stands the test. Saucy and naughty as Polly was when in evidence, she had hidden moments of shame for it, resolves to be better, fleeting insights that she wasn't a grown-up, wasn't in the game with them though her mother pretended she was; wasn't the *real thing*, after all: Dora was the real thing. And thus out of her very naughtinesses, a new ideal of womanhood was drawing Polly's little soul to a pattern of larger scale.

Still, Dora misinterpreted their sighs and looks when she left her family to their own devices for the evening and betook herself off alone to her study. Her mother immediately had her upsurge of jealousy for the Great Unknown; Eric felt cross, for no reason he could name; Polly felt dull and sinky. Dora had hardly gone before

they were all asking each other: "I wonder what she's doing in there alone? What can she find to interest herself in for a whole evening away from—*us!*" And Eric would wind up the discussion of her and express the general sentiment, exclaiming bitterly: "Ain't her own folks nothin' to her? What's anything to her, then, I'd like to know?"

The thought that he "wasn't anything to her" now began to gnaw at him worse than the thought that she "looked down" on him. . . . He told himself he wouldn't have cared if she were "mad at" him—guessed she had a little right to be mad 'bout the letter—but to show him her own brother *wasn't anything* to her! What's she made of, anyways? Ice? . . . While Polly was in school in the morning, he loafed about the kitchen, mumbling and grumbling, one thing one minute, another thing the next, snapped his mother up if she offered a suggestion; kissed her when she looked hurt; forgot all about it five minutes later and let fly again; and just generally moped around, sprawling out his long legs to get his hands in his pockets and tripping her up as she went about her work, until she became fairly frantic with him and asked impatiently: "Whatever ails you, Eric? I never saw you going on like this before? Can't you find some work outdoors helpin' on the ranch? We a man short-handed, and all that shovelling to keep the paths open, snowing the way it is—I should think you'd be glad to. Can't you amuse yourself an hour in the house while I get dinner?" After these scoldings he would clump away and throw himself on his bed and lie there till she came hurrying, all contrition, to see if he were sick, and get a kiss.

She was beginning to feel sick herself. Poor soul, she had tried everything she knew from cooking to amusements to bring back her Eric of the old days; and failed.

She racked her brains for the reason and guessed everything but the right one: he was moping and glooming over Dora! He wasn't yet conscious that he admired her; trusted and respected her more than any one but his own father; would have denied it if he had been told he did. He didn't know what he felt about her, but he loved her immaculate neatness, loved the thought that "all the other girls out there couldn't hold a candle to her"; loved her clear-cut, high-bred beauty; loved her quiet simplicity and unadornment; loved just to look at her shyly across the table and think, "My sister's *some diff' runt* from that Addie Rohmer!" and there were moments when she walked into the room all dressed in white, which she still wore in the afternoon to please her mother, when something seemed to go all over him and prickle his skin. She brought to the surface a hitherto untouched portion of his nature. Crude as he was, he was feeling the thrall of uncomprehended things; was suddenly become aware of the cryptic there is in every woman's soul, and it just a little frightened him. There was something about her that made him want to run away and stay with her at the same moment; made him want to talk and tell her things, and afraid to say a word; her silence was like ice, and her smiles sent sparkles dancing through his blood. Out of this chaos of adolescent thought and feeling, a new ideal of manhood was forming in his mind—he wanted above everything to show her he wasn't as bad as she must be thinking—he hadn't come home on purpose to snatch the letter—just did it because he was angry—was awful sorry he'd done it, and if she'd only forgive him and like him a little—let bygones be bygones—give him a chance to show that he meant to do the right thing, he'd do it—to please her! Why, he'd do anything in the wide world to please her—couldn't she see that?—And how

he was trying to make up—if she'd give him the chance to make up—invite him in to her study for a quiet talk? Then he'd tell her how sorry he was, and knew he hadn't done jes' right snatchin' his father's letter away from her—didn't blame her a mite fer bein' mad—would of been mad himself at anybody done that to him, but if the fella done it said he's sorry, why that's all they'd be to it: bygones would be bygones. . . .

There are certain natures to whom sin is the first crack in the material and passional fence through which the soul peeps into the unseen world at problems purely idealistic with no material or passional equivalents. Thus came his first glimpse into the unseen moral world to Eric—came in the hour when he stood up like a man for the first time in his life and declared openly, face to face with himself: "I done *wrong* by Dora that time—I *stole* papa's letter—an' stealin's a *sin*!" and with that revelation life began to take on new inner meanings.

The revelation itself had been sudden, sharp, cutting, convincing as the thrust of a stiletto when it came, but it had been led up to by weeks of chaotic thinking and moping in which he had worn threadbare the ideas that Dora was "down on" him, "mad" at him, "didn't like" him, and was trying to show he "wasn't anything to her";—as explanations they simply weren't adequate to what he daily lived with; for Dora was too polite—rather glassily so; too calmly impersonal; too unmoved by the little squalls of family life. She never lost her temper and had moods, or if she did, she never showed it—she was the same one day as the next; while Polly and himself, and even his mother—"why, they got so upset, they flew all to bits!" It was part of their "game" with life to show what they "couldn't stand." But

Dora!—"why, things jes' didn't seem to hit her—not like how y'd expect they would; didn't somehow *reach her*." It was precisely through her being so out of his reach physically when she retired to her solitudes that he had come to see her as out of reach inwardly, remote and apart from the common interests, the common passions of the life he knew; and why his explanations wore so thin and threadbare as he used them on her day by day until he hadn't a whole one left that fitted.

Thus the thought: "I done *wrong*—I *stole* that letter—it was a *sin*," came inevitably as the dawn of day. And what a world it opened to his inner vision! Recalling his past, there wasn't anything that couldn't be met with some sort of visible repayment suited to the act and the occasion; after which he'd gone about his affairs with a pleasing sense that "things were evened up" and by-gones would be by-gones. This *sin* couldn't be "evened up" by any of the accustomed methods. There was no unreading a letter—you couldn't take it out of your mind and hand it back once you'd put it in; and the more you tried to forget it, the more it stuck to you. *That* was why Dora wouldn't take the letter when he handed it to her: he didn't give back the secret with the letter—he'd stolen it. And his stealing wasn't all there was to it, either—there was her side of the story: her father had trusted her to keep that secret; requests, wheedling, coaxing, threats—she wouldn't tell—didn't care what folks thought about her—he'd trusted her and that was enough; she'd die sooner than tell. Eric began then dimly to understand the force and meaning of the word "honor" he'd heard for the first time from her lips. To his associates things were only right or wrong; but she had something invisible, subtle, unyielding that moved and guided her—honor; and it amazed, attracted, and repelled him all in the same

breath—just as he felt with her when she was by! A revelation! His boy-man ideas and feelings went into a fresh turmoil. With this new influx of inner light, his sister became not less, but more mysterious than ever. Woman *was* mysterious—entirely different from man!—you might as well admit it. Another revelation! . . . And why hadn't Dora screamed and resisted when he attacked her? Addie would have howled and fought like a cat—if he'd kept her from scratching his eyes out, she'd have bitten him in the neck while he was getting the letter away from her, the way she did that time he tried to snatch a postal some fella'd sent her—wanted to see who thought he had a right to send her postals like that. . . . Why, she bit so it bled! An' then afterward went an' blabbed it to all the other fellas an' gottum down on *him*. . . . Dora never said a word—didn't even look a word all these weeks and weeks; and yet the whole time she knew that he had *sinned*! Dora the mysterious. . . . Woman mysterious. . . . The eternal feminine. . . .

The glamour of the eternal feminine penetrated him with a faint strange perfume; filled him with wordless longings for an unknown something that was at once youth, beauty, pain, peace, joy, forgiveness, and was yet so different from anything he had ever felt before in his life he questioned at times if it were really himself feeling and longing all this, or some stranger fellow that had got inside him. No wonder he did nothing but mope and moon about the house till he drove his poor doting mother nearly distracted!

Dora on her part, outside of school hours, did little but think about him, wondering what was going on inside him. With such a father, he *must* know what a sin he had committed; but after the first shamefaced day,

he showed no sign of repentance. Therefore, he must be "a hardened character," and *very* wicked! Thus as she watched him from week to week she saw him on the road to becoming the typical Wyoming "bad man," never suspecting the light of a new moral day dawning on his soul.

Yet other feelings quite new to her were working upward. In moments when her Puritanism was off guard, the way he had caught and pinioned her against the wall with his big hands and powerful arms would come over her with a thrill. He had shown himself—the elemental brute male! There was something splendid and robust in the very simplicity, the unabashed fury, the directness and force with which he had done his will, once he had started to—something actually bigger than she had ever seen or suspected before in a man. Youth, its muscles tensed, its blood aboil, its heart aflame with primeval passion—beside that picture, her nice, kind college professors seemed old and weary, creatures of routine and futility, bloodless shadows wandering across her bloodless, shadowy past. And the glamour of brute male force spread over her, filling her with wordless pride that this strong, uncouth, violent, elemental wicked young brute was—her brother!

She didn't acknowledge the pride—*that* would have been to default on her Puritan ideals of moral righteousness—but she felt the thrills of it in spite of her moral righteousness, and they awakened in her new longings, half conscious, unnamed, vague pictures of a man that would protect her with his strength, warm her at the elemental fires; her man—her mate. She didn't so much want to be loved as to love—to have for hers a man whose big muscles and brute strength she would glory in when she said, "He's mine!" He'd be like Eric, and of course, not like him a bit; when he seized

her wrists it was to pull her to him—sweep her up into his arms. . . . At that point she would come to herself and blush. . . . As for Eric, he had sinned and he must be punished.

Within a few weeks both saw that Eric's sin was the gulf that separated them utterly; but in some mysterious way, it seemed also to unite them. Not a word was said, or ever seemed likely to be said, on either side, yet his eyes constantly sought hers and begged, "Forgive me! I'm so sorry!" and hers replied, "*I* cannot forgive that sin—it was father you robbed!" and in that mute interchange, a filament seemed to spin out between them across the gulf over which each made little excursions into the other's soul. In these deep moments, real sympathy sprang up in their hearts; they hated to see each other suffer and feel the cause of it, but neither knew what to say to relieve it. Then they would turn away, inwardly sighing: "Oh, dear! I wish I knew what to do!"

Eric would ram his hands in his pockets and look out at the white quilted meadows and up into the gray, snow-laden sky, wondering what it all meant—the world, life, people, misunderstandings, suffering, sin; what his father had meant by the words: "I lost God on the plains." It was the only thing in the letter he remembered, and it began to haunt him. . . . Dora must know what papa meant—he'd ask her. At that, a pang would go through the poor boy: he had no right even to know those words—they were part of what he had stolen and could never give back, and could never understand unless Dora told him! . . . But oh, if she'd forgive him a little bit—enough so he could ask her! . . . He hung about the kitchen waiting for her and he would watch her shyly, hungrily, dropping his

eyes when she looked his way; but if their eyes happened to meet, a spark seemed to leap across the gulf direct into their hearts; words almost came, "I'm so sorry—let's forgive and start fresh!" their hands almost reached out and clasped. Then something within them said No, and they would look away again; no—for Eric must be punished—he must be made to feel and realize how he had sinned against everything noble and right.

Punishment just then was her great standby, the one point on which she felt morally and rationally secure. Like him, she was in process of "finding herself," and though she had education, more experience and knowledge of the world, and a larger assortment of moral attitudes and purposes, she was just as much at sea with him, as he with her. But the real inwardness of her fate there on the ranch was this: In her, a world that was essentially evangelical and sexless had come into collision with a world of sex, passions, appetites, self-indulgence, expedients, absolutions, irresponsibility; and the onslaught of this trampling life without on the tessellated structure of her life within marred her clear outlines, made cracks, left débris that wouldn't fit back into place again, and this demolished her sense of inner guidance and security. In her sexless scheme of values, moral attitudes, purposes, there was no place for Eric, as men or brothers; yet here he was, a dominating fact, a man and a brother, and she had to reckon with him, willy-nilly, because she was his legal guardian! And of course, she meant to do her duty. But the worst of it all was that, while she was trying to reckon with him on her scheme of things and in terms of a world that summed itself up and traded wholesale with the word *work*, her mother was trying all the time to make her reckon with him on *her* scheme, that summed itself up in the word *love*, with the result that they couldn't

reckon with him on either, and it soon got so they couldn't mention him at all without a scene, Dora stiffening up and bringing down her little moral axe, her mother slumping to a mush of pleadings and concessions, in her plaintive, pathetic way that ended everything and settled nothing.

Love! What did Dora know about it? Nothing. To her it was an adjunct, not a necessity; a fine thing, no doubt a pleasing experience, if it happened to come your way, and evidently needed by some people, judging by their talk, and evidently not needed by her as they needed it. Once a girl at college had called love "the breath of life." Dora thought her a lunatic and fought shy of her ever after. If all the love in the world were killed off at the next stroke of the clock, she felt she would still have a game worth her candle, a noble, moral game for an able-minded worker. *Love* Eric!—why, she couldn't. She didn't even try to, and excused her not trying by "You can't make love to order, whatever else." But she could do her duty by him—a cold, calm, judicial, impersonal, passionless duty, worthy the Roman stoics and her father!

But the everlasting "How?" The endless haunting call for supernal guidance, a divine command that would tell her how; the endless conflict with her New England conscience and the bald facts of the case and those new, strange feelings and emotions insidiously creeping into her life and thought through Eric's continued presence; the endless struggle to "see the light and do the right," below which ran the current, mostly invisible, but often eddying up in spoken words: "Oh, if God would only show me the exact, right thing to do for everybody! . . . God never answers me, or, if he does, I don't know it!—the answer doesn't seem any different from one of my own thoughts. That's what Herbert

Spencer said, or something like it: If we do get an answer to prayer, *we know it only in the terms of our own consciousness*—which puts a spoke in your prayer machinery from the start. If you can't know—if there isn't some way of identifying God's voice when he speaks—there would be no use in his speaking anyway. To be of the slightest real use in the guidance of your life, you'd have to know God's voice and commands *as* his voice and commands—a matter our college preachers never seemed to note when they were urging us to obey God's commands—they seemed to be thinking only of the Mosaic *commandments*. Anybody could obey the commandments without half trying, and without getting one step nearer seeing how to do your duty by Eric, and the rest of the family. . . . Cold canned commandments—*so* nourishing to the hungry soul! One little fresh word from God to me *now!*—” But the one little fresh word never came; the moral law was all she felt she had; she would trudge along somehow, doing her duty . . . and making Eric feel, through and through, how he had sinned.

CHAPTER XIX

It took something over two months for the general situation to develop thus far—months of increasing family tension, if for no other reason than that they were all snowed in together, hardly stepping outside the house for a breath of fresh air. Polly was the only one who got any fun out of the snow, and sloshed about in the drifts with her dog, filling the countryside with yells and barks till Dora was so nervous and Eric so peevish they could have spanked her. "She only does it to annoy folks," he growled. "Nothing she loves better—all she thinks of is how she can stick herself in, make y' know she's round the place even when she ain't accchelly stampin' on yer feet. Why can't she learn to play decent?"—which brought the usual "child-with-so-few-pleasures" admonition from his mother, and the suggestion that he go out and play with her, that sent him off to his room to mope. Dora suggested work, and Polly spent two afternoons digging a runway and steps from Dora's little side porch through which her study connected with the house that she might "get out quick and easy" and slide on the ice-crust spreading over the meadowlands—a pleasure Dora didn't find inviting, though Polly thought it entrancing to tie barrel staves on your feet, and go slithering along for half a mile, the wind in your back and your coat for a sail.

Mrs. Feruseth alternated between joys and distresses. For one joy, she had her son at home, apparently for the winter, and each delicious dish she cooked for him that he guzzled down with loud "yum-yums" made

her feel she had cut one of the invisible threads holding him to his former life, pulling him away from home and mother. Yet daily she became more conscious of the changes in her children, and the widening rifts in the lute between each pair of them—a situation in which all of her children were refusing to “swallow” each other; and that was the one situation their mother couldn’t “swallow” in her home! Funny. Pathetic. Her heart brooded over all of them with tender yearning and solicitude for their happiness; her mind groped aimlessly for reasons, ending its quests in a plaintive: “I don’t see why they can’t love each other—be happy together. Brothers and sisters of one family, and you’d think they were strangers!” But not having the faintest idea what was going on below the surface in their souls, her efforts at making them love and be happy by choking them down each other’s throats only kept them the more stirred up, and ready to be on the defensive against her suggestions. She dropped numerous hints to Dora about “how nice it would be” if she would “stay and play checkers with Eric in the evenings, now he’s home.” Dora either artfully evaded, or frankly ignored them, and stalked off to her room. Her mother then tried the hints on Eric—Dora was evidently waiting to be invited to play checkers—if *he* would ask her—

“I dunno’s I wanta play with her,” he mumbled.

“’Fraid she’d beat y’?” teased Polly.

“’Fraid nothin’! What put that idear inta yer head? Muh hands is too cold—wanta keep ’em in muh pockets.”

“I guess y’ mean yer *feet’s cold!*” she flipped back at him, dumping the checkers on the table, and raking them rapidly in place on the board, pushing it in front of him as a challenge while Olaf showed his appreciation

of both her wit and her challenge in a loud guffaw, and "You betcher! Polly hit it—he's got cold feet fast enough this time!"

"Playin' checkers with her ain't where *I* git cold feet," asserted Eric enigmatically, and clumped off to his room.

Mrs. Feruseth would have wept if she had been alone; but with Olaf watching and blinking—and thinking about her and her family—thinking much too much, she then felt—she managed to keep up appearances for the rest of the lonely evening, which she made as short as possible; and in bed, she gathered Polly tight in her arms, whispering pathetically: "You won't go off next and leave your mamma alone? You love your poor old mamma still, don't you?—same as ever—much as ever," and got what comfort she could out of Polly's brief "Yep. . . . But I don't like Eric—he's gettin' loonier an' meaner every day—won't do a thing y' want him to. I bet it's Addie he's mopin' over makes him act so."

Her mother positively knew it was, and positively declared it wasn't. "Eric long ago stopped thinking of that bold hussy—how could he want anything more to do with her after he'd seen what a real lady was—had one in his own home—Dora? He hadn't so much as said Addie's name for weeks and weeks."

"That's how I know he's mopin' fer her," explained Polly with her uncanny shrewdness. "But I'm so sleepy."

With her worst fears so ably corroborated, Mrs. Feruseth decided that her patience was no longer a virtue—something should be done at once to make both Dora and Eric see that they must "sacrifice themselves for others," and nerved by what seemed her obvious duty, she took the bull by the horns and went

to Dora's study, though when her knock was answered by a firm "Come in," and she opened the door and went in, and found herself facing a distinctly antagonistic young person in white, her boldness all evaporated, and she brought out lamely: "I thought I'd come and see you for a little visit—we haven't had one for weeks—I don't know when I was in last for a chat, it's so long—not since Eric came home." She sat down uneasily by the fire. "What are you doing in here all alone?"

"Just thinking."

"Just *thinking*! But what can you find to think about so much? After all the thinking you must of done at college a person might think you'd thought enough! Weeks and weeks now you've gone off by yourself, left the whole family together in the kitchen . . . and you're just thinking! I didn't know but you might be writing on your book . . . or maybe embroidering . . . or something."

Dora gave her a slightly wry smile before replying, "No, I was only thinking—what I ought to do about Eric—do for him——"

"Why, so was I!" her mother threw in brightly, feeling the way opening easier than she had expected. "—thinking almost the very identical words when you spoke them—what you ought to do for Eric to amuse him evenings."

"Oh! Amuse him! That hadn't—occurred to me."

"I was wondering—if it had," returned her mother, holding her hands to the fire to give herself something to do while she picked her words with caution, "for I been saying to myself if it had occurred to you that you ought to help amuse him evenings—make home pleasant to him—evenings is the worst time for young men—that's when they go out and off—why, I felt sure you'd been doing it before this."

"But how?"

"Play games with him—with the rest of us—you and him, Polly and me, that makes four hands. Learn him some new games you played at college."

"I never played games at college—except tennis. And I—I don't approve of cards at all." She refrained from adding that she thought cards a scandalous waste of time for any one pretending to intelligent interest in the world at large.

Her mother had already heard this statement several times, but she wasn't there to be put off with slim excuses, and responded at once: "Then play checkers! Even a priest will play checkers—at least Father Humphry used to play with my father back in the old country—night after night I've seen them at it, their toddy-glasses beside the board. Eric loves checkers, but he's nobody to play with he cares to play with. He beats me too easy—I have so much on my mind I forget which is his, black or white, and when I move one of his by mistake it makes him cross. Polly plays, but she's gettin' so sharp she beats him most of the time now, and that makes him so provoked he won't play at all. But now you, Dody, you ought to be able to put up a good game with him, yet always let him beat in the end! It wouldn't take him long to get feeling friendly and sociable with you if he beats you and you're pleasant about it, and act as if he really won the game through his own smartness, you tryin' your hardest not to let him."

Dora's lip curled and her eyes flashed. Was it possible that a grown-up man could stoop to such childishness and find satisfaction in it? To "give" her a game she felt an insult to her ability and her character. She told herself heatedly: "It's outrageous for her to suggest it to me—she ought to know me better. *She* may think

such deceptions necessary—I *don't!* I won't pander to *any* man's vanity, least of all to—Eric's!" With that, she added another chapter to those mysterious sex differences her mother was always harping on as the clew to everything.

Without realizing it, her mother had added some vivid touches of color to the picture of humanity's meaner side—a picture of man needing to be wheedled, pampered, *kept* at home, *kept* out of bad company, *kept* in a good humor though being cheated by his womenfolk: a flashlight portrait of morally tubercular man bundled up to the eyes in a cotton batting of flatteries and deceptions, and woman purveying the flatteries as her natural mode of life! Shabby, degrading for both parties, and appalling that family unity in modern civilization had to be attained and in the last word rested on such foundations. This surly, irresponsible, dishonorable boy—he had to have everything done, everybody sacrificed for *him*! What *injustice*! The very matter-of-courseness in the way her mother put it all, and always had, accepting the purveyor attitude as her natural function, shocked Dora a little more than the portrait of man, and brought forth rather more than her usual resentment and rebellion. *She* wouldn't stoop to any such truckling! Her Puritan blood protested against the efficacy of salvation by checker-board.

Her mother, suddenly conscious that the pause she had left for her words of wisdom to sink in was somewhat lengthy, looked up from the fire, and catching sight of the scornful lips, and misreading them, made haste to add: "I wasn't meaning for you to come out to the kitchen and play with him, Dody—I know how you don't like it there with the men—their smoke and smells and all. Neil smells so he makes me sick—I

couldn't stand it—it's why I came out—came to see you. I wonder you didn't notice it at supper, but you set farther off. Soon's cold weather comes on, he stops washin' entirely. There's nothing to do, only keep away from him. If we left the men the kitchen, I don't think they'd follow us in here." Her tone expressed some doubt.

"I don't think they would!" flashed Dora dryly; which, however, only encouraged her mother to let loose her dream in full: "They wouldn't—here's the one place on the ranch where the family can be by ourselves! I'm so sick and tired of havin' those men always underfoot—not a word or a look between one of us but *they* must lap it up—see what they can see in everything. It's come to such a pass Olaf's got to thinking he's so much one o' the family and man of the place since your father died, he's actually encouraging Polly to be saucy to Eric and get him upset till he don't know what he's about—doing everything he can to make him ugly and irresponsible, and put him in a bad light so *he'll* be the one you look to and depend on. Nothing suits him better than seeing you and Eric not getting along together. And he's so sly about it, too—not sly enough but what I see through him perfectly, though he don't suspect it! But he never tried any such tricks while your papa was alive!—*he* wouldn't put up with a word of eggin' on or interference from anybody in his affairs, or with the children—gave the men to understand the bunk-house belonged to them and the house to the family. It wasn't till after he died that Olaf started hanging round in here. . . . I suppose I oughtn't to say anything—he did it out of kindness to me, and I'm sure I don't know what I'd have done through that winter without him—but it's made things so that if you said anything now—when he feels he's been given

the same rights here as the rest of us—there'd be a scene. I've avoided look or word that might lead to it—you don't know what might come of it once he got started feeling he wasn't treated properly. But there'd be nothing said—he wouldn't dare go as far as that with you—if we just came away quietly and left them in the kitchen—made no explanations and said nothing ourselves they could take offense at or argue about—and you doing it this way, things would settle themselves. . . . The fire's just right for poppin' corn—there's those extra fine apples you got from California—Eric was opening a fresh box when I came out—I and Polly could pop the corn and crack the nuts while you play checkers with him. I'll go tell them to bring their things in here."

Deceived by the prolonged silence into thinking her arguments had taken effect and won consent, and warned by past experience not to dally, allowing the consent to be whittled down by arguments, conditions, reservations, her mother immediately rose and with a hasty "I'll be back in a minute" started for the kitchen.

Dora had been too dumfounded by the suddenness of the onslaught—the adroit way her mother had done up the whole mess, nuts, apples, checkers, Polly, Eric, moods, quarrels, tantrums, in a bundle and dumped it on her—to say a word until her mother had her hand on the door-knob; then she shot out: "Mother! Wait a moment, please!"

Her mother felt the stab in the tone and wheeled about.

"There are reasons why Eric is positively *forbidden* to enter my study."

So there was something after all! Her mother returned quickly to the chair she had left, but didn't sit

down again. Dora had risen and was standing in an attitude proclaiming: "I've had my say and decline to argue. Good night." But her mother was too thrilled at the idea of the mystery about to be cleared up to note more than the general lack of invitation in the attitude.

"Oh, well, if you feel that way," she began sweetly, to entice the secret out of its burrow, where, judging by Dora's hard, set face, it seemed meaning to stay hid. "I'm sure I didn't know you did feel that way—nothing has been said to me about anything between you and Eric—about anything you have laid up against him. . . . If I'd known how you felt—" She took hold of the back of the chair, steadying herself against the icy silence she only then became conscious of, ordering her to mind her own business and go; and she was determined not to go till she had the truth. "Well, I didn't know how you felt, and I'm sorry if I said anything you take offense at. . . . I thought you'd like to have the whole family together by ourselves—thought you'd be glad to have your mother with you a little while every day. I never see you any more, except at meals—you and Polly both away from me all morning—I can't leave Polly and Eric alone in the kitchen while I visit with you. . . . Why, how would it look? What would they think if I did? I'd have them both jealous of you, calling you the favorite! . . . I can't single out one child above another to stay with—it wouldn't do."

Her tone had become plaintively appealing, but meeting still only the icy silence, loudly declaring, "I've said my say and decline to argue, so you may as well stop!" and seeing not a glimmer of appreciation of her feelings or the beautiful case she had spread out, she began to let herself go—inwardly. "Now you have this nice room all fixed up, I should think you'd be *glad* to

let the other members of the family get the benefit of it—evenings, anyway; you have it to yourself all day—nobody interferes with your studies then, or your teaching Polly, or questions what you do. But keeping Eric out of the one nice, comfortable, pretty room in the house the way you're doing, why it makes the boy feel driven out of house and home! Any sensitive boy would take it that way—*driven out*—when you make it so plain to him he's not wanted; and it'll end by driving him back to that Rohmer girl!—she at least has human feelings if she is a low, designing hussy—and she'll get him into trouble sure as day is day—then where will you be? My only wonder is she hasn't got him into it already. So you ought to be willing to sacrifice yourself for his amusement—ought to be glad to—sacrifice a little of your time and convenience, instead of living wrapped up in yourself in complete disregard of the wishes and feelings of others—your own flesh and blood—all you got in the world to love and live for, and you his guard-*een* besides—any sister would who wasn't perfectly *heartless*."

For answer, Dora put her hands behind her back, clinching them one into the other till they hurt. She wouldn't trust herself to speak then, feeling if she did, she would let herself go and say things from which there would be no backing down later. . . . But *heartless!* Her mother could stand there in the act of robbing her—cutting up her soul in little bits to feed to Eric, and call anybody else *heartless!*

One of the penalties of the battle with the world not ours is a morbid introspection, depending on the individual as to whether it becomes hysterical through irritation, or melancholy through the discouragement of thwarted effort. At each stage of the conflict a deeper level is tapped, and the forces set free, in proportion as

they cease to be individual and become class differences, then racial instincts, grow more massive and overwhelming. Unconsciously, her mother had tapped a deeper level in Dora than ever before. Just what nobler purpose her college education might be put to, just what she could do better with herself and her advantages than "uplift and save" her brother, she didn't try to say. She only felt and saw, as never before, the meaning of her values for her family, of their demands upon her: they must have every last thing she had for their—*amusement!* And the irony of Eric's being rewarded by having her dished up for him on the checker-board when what he deserved at her hands was PUNISHMENT—good, hard, old-fashioned, rock-principled punishment—till he realized what sin and dishonor meant!

As had happened so often between them before, her mother picked up the word "punishment" out of the atmosphere, and it produced its subtle change in her current, switching it from Dora to Eric. In an instant she was defending him against the alien. "I don't know what he said or did that time to offend you—he'd never told me; but whatever it was he's sorry. That's what ails him now—I see it if you don't—he's sorry and afraid to say it. Can't you forgive him and let bygones be bygones between you? Here it is Christmas time—can't you feel at peace, you two? Can't you make some allowances for him, Dody?—he's only a boy!—a big, overgrown boy, not much older in his mind than Polly—not near as shrewd and self-possessed. Hasn't he suffered enough—haven't you punished him enough to satisfy you?"

She stopped with that appeal, her mind a jumble of broken arguments and scraps of thought she knew she ought to use, but couldn't piece together and bring out,

yet still trying to hold her ground until she had won at least a yielding look from the stony figure in front of her. All at once she became conscious of the darkness. While they had talked, the untended fire had crumbled; the heavily shaded lamp cut its small circle out of a dense surrounding brown. She felt herself immersed in something unearthly—a brown, brooding silence that benumbed her faculties with a sense of the uncanny, repelled her like a cold hand on her heart, frosting whatever resistance she had left. She thought of the kitchen with its three garish reflector lamps, the chatter, the quarrelling, the laughter, the eating; of *her* children—they were alive, eager, responding, *human*. Her one desire was to get back to them—and to humanity; how she “left things” here suddenly didn’t matter.

“Well, good night,” was all she said, and went away on tiptoe.

It was not till she heard the door close that Dora came to herself and realized how she had let her mother go without a word; but wished she had said something, feeling mean that she hadn’t—it seemed so like “piling things on.” It was bad enough to have refused pointblank, without making the rest seem so personal: a good-night kiss wouldn’t have hurt anything. But the truth was, her mother’s last arrow had gone through the skin and struck a vital spot, and Dora had stood there, literally too conscience-stricken to speak while she had the chance. Was she “punishing Eric to satisfy herself?” How preposterous! She was punishing him for his own good. . . . He was only a boy and she was heartless? Not at all—just punishment was a duty she owed him as his guardian. . . . Hadn’t he been punished enough? Who was to say—as long as he didn’t show repentance? . . . But *was* she heartless?—*was* she unwilling to sacri-

fice herself for his good and benefit?—was she really, unacknowledged to herself, punishing him to satisfy herself? *Of course* she wasn't! . . . A little fresh air would prove she wasn't. . . . She put on her heavy wraps and went out by her side-porch door, climbing the snow steps Polly had dug for her, then sliding gingerly over the new crust formed by the noon thaw and the night freeze until she was far enough from the house to see a sweep of sky. Above her head twittered myriads of stars—myriads of worlds aflame; and in company with them were still other myriads of worlds invisible—cooled and darkened worlds, and each, perhaps, with its freight of—what? Life? Souls? Hearts like her own, yearning for guidance and trying to do right—their duty—only duty, not heartless punishment for the sake of satisfying themselves? Her eyes roved over the constellations she knew, naming them one by one, and sought the north star she loved most of all, because for ages it had been silently telling man how his world swung on its axis, never varying. What mighty power kept all these in their places from the largest to the tiniest invisible speck of dust? Was it God? He must, then, fill all space! He couldn't hear her call—the call of a speck of dust to one so vast! No—humanity might worship and adore, but it was fatuous to look to him for personal guidance and comfort. . . . But, oh, if God had only thought to provide some spiritual being not quite so vast and *so busy with big things!* If he didn't have time for helping people along with good advice himself, he could at least let somebody or something tell you how to do your duty by a brother you couldn't love—couldn't understand—couldn't amuse and keep at home without lowering yourself and your ideals! . . . As for not sacrificing herself—she had been sacrificed more or less by her whole family ever since

she set foot in the house, and always with a mouthful of plausible reasons and excuses that made it seem no sacrifice at all! Even her father had actually sacrificed her to his totally impracticable scheme of a community of kindred souls drawing moral and spiritual sustenance from a soil that had none to give. She knew that in a dim background of her mind, but she was too loyal to let it come out and take words. *How* they had sacrificed her!—and then talked about her “selfishness,” and she trying so hard to do her *duty* by all of them!

“But you never *sacrificed yourself* for them!”

The words shot through her mind from a source apparently outside herself—a voice. But whose? She couldn't answer—couldn't decide what it was she had heard, or how she had heard it; she only knew that for the first time in her life she had received something not “in the terms of her own consciousness”; something entirely new, a thought she had never thought to herself before; a revelation that instantly illuminated everything! She had *been sacrificed*—she had never *sacrificed herself*, willingly, intentionally, with a purpose in view. She had never given up one little thing she valued to help make a man of Eric; never had even tried to be real friends with him, and he—“only a boy in his mind,” as her mother said—a shy, sorry, timid boy with that hungry look in his eyes, silently begging a little understanding and love. . . . Self-sacrifice—why, she needed it for her own soul's sake to prove she wasn't punishing him for her own satisfaction!

All at once the sense of oppression, of melancholy, and failure in which she had lived for months rolled from her. She felt a freedom and exaltation of spirit lifting her to

the very stars on high. In offering herself a willing sacrifice she had ceased to be victim and become victor!

While these thoughts threaded through her, a wolf away in the foot-hills began to howl—a lone voice, eerie and sad, as if he invoked the deities of his tribe in vain. . . . Addie Rohmer! . . . Dora didn't know what brought the two words together in her mind, wolf and Addie. She had never seen Addie—knew nothing about her but what her mother said and hinted; but what she meant just now by her warning: "She'll get Eric into trouble—then where will you be?" How could Addie get Eric "into trouble?" Dora guessed everything but what her mother had intended to convey.

The wolf drew nearer, scenting quarry, running it down, his hunting cry echoing and re-echoing among the hills. Something must die in the dark that he might live. . . . Must something die that the she-wolf Addie might live? Eric?

At that picture a fierce thrill rose in Dora's heart, the call of blood to blood-tie: no wolf, wild or human, should have her brother while she stood near.

"Oh, no—oh, no, Addie Rohmer!" She defied wolf and girl together. "Howl yourself hoarse—run yourself lame—you'll never get him while I'm his keeper! He's my brother—I'm his guardian—he has a sister willing and glad to sacrifice herself to save him from you!"

CHAPTER XX

THE whole family was getting ready for Christmas. Outside, fat soggy snowflakes, lazily drifting down since midnight, had spread a woolly quilt embroidered with coyote tracks over the ranges, a dead level of white with endless miles of dark holes as far as the eye could reach that the sun filled with water the minute it broke through the patchy clouds. Immediately after breakfast Olaf and Neil on horseback, each "towing" an extra horse for a relay, had started for the post-office—the first time in two weeks—determined to bring home the Christmas mail or perish;—an errand that, going out, meant floundering through miles of unbroken snow, knee-deep everywhere, and up to the horses' withers in some of the "draws." Coming back it wouldn't be so hard, as they would have their own stamped trail to offset the extra loads.

Inside, Mrs. Feruseth was preparing a feast worthy the day and her Irish generosity. In spite of the discouraging prospect, she was hoping some of the neighbors would get there, either on horseback or snow-shoes, and she was cooking enough to last a week if they did, for that was the usual way things turned out at Christmas: when people got there they couldn't get away. They frequently found her hospitality and her puddings more detaining than the snow! All her children were in the kitchen helping her—sorting raisins and currants, slicing citron, fussing over dozens of things that were sticky and smelled good. Dora had on a large apron and was cutting up a pumpkin for pie. "Just for

Eric," she told him, laughing. "I wouldn't do it for anybody else." And he laughed back: "If y'll make me a pie with yer own fingers, I'll eat the whole of it, even if y' burn it top an' bottom an' clean way through." A man who would eat burnt pie was a hero in his opinion—he knew no higher tribute to reward her with.

"If I make it, I'll make it right or eat it myself for punishment," she flashed back.

"No need fer to punish yerself when y' gotta man ready to take it fer y'," he returned with shy gallantry.

"Thanks. I'm ready to take it myself—if I deserve it."

He looked at her doubtfully; then with conviction as she assured him: "I certainly shall take it—if I do anything so inhuman as to burn a perfectly good pumpkin pie." . . . How very strange! Was anybody ever ready to take a punishment that could be gotten out of? . . . Of course a man would stand up an' take a lickin' from another man fer to git even; but a girl—and to punish herself! What made her—like that—and so different from everybody else in the whole world? . . . He stirred a huge bowl of cake dough for his mother—stirred so hard he nearly broke her wooden spoon. The idea of getting even with yourself for things you did! All at once a new light broke upon him: "*That's* what makes Dora diff'runt—she gits even with herself! She makes herself do things—right." Just what things, he didn't decide.

Mrs. Feruseth flustered about amidst dishes and pans, beaming, kissing her children turn and turn about as she found a free minute, giving Eric a cuff on the cheek with her floury hand that set Polly screaming with delight. Eric paid his mother back by grabbing her bodily up and threatening to throw her out into the big drift if she didn't give him ten kisses and promise

to be good. Polly, while he was still struggling with his mother, snatched a long strip of pumpkin and stuffed it into his mouth for a tongue, which he wagged at them, and set them all shrieking and wagging pumpkin tongues at each other until they choked with laughter, tongues, and tears. Funniest thing that ever happened in the world! Then they made pumpkin teeth and gnashed them. It was Dora who suggested the teeth and showed them how; think of it—Dora, the dignified! . . . Dora had suddenly unbent her dignity, or at least her stiffness with her family and they hardly knew what to make of it. Mrs. Feruseth, however, regarded the unbending with less surprise than self-satisfaction: her words of wisdom the night before had obviously taken effect as maternal wisdom was bound to do in well-regulated daughters not “utterly spoiled by college,” which was how she interpreted the case, not suspecting that for the wisdom to take effect a special revelation had had to come later. But the fact was suddenly patent to all of them that Dora was only a girl after all with a lot of fun in her once she loosened up. “Nice fun, too, that makes y’ feel sorta kinda good inside,” thought Eric, “not a bit like Addie’s fun.” He slipped his hand into his pocket and crowded down half a dozen meretricious postals he had received from her during the winter, but had never shown at home, and when his mother reminded him to put wood in the range and get her fire ready for the cake, he slyly thrust them under the stick and slammed the door. “That *ends* Addie fer me,” he told himself, and straightened up to his full height feeling cleansed of an intangible odor of impurity. His mother turning and seeing him there inwardly gloating over the ashes of a shame-stained past, exclaimed: “Dear me! What a big man you’re getting!—over six foot high and a yard

across the shoulders! But I don't like to see you so stoopy. Push out your chest, darlin' . . . yes, like that!"

He swelled out his chest, and won from Dora, "My! but you are big and strong!" and then put his biceps on exhibition and commanded her to "feel o' *that!*" which she did, repeating, "My!" with an admiration that was by no means all affected in her effort to be friendly.

A flush rose to his cheeks and spread all over him in a tingly, warm sensation. It was the first word of approval she had ever given him, and it meant more than anything any one had ever said; made him so happy he felt choky and couldn't tell her how that big, powerful hard-muscled arm was at her service. . . . And they were all so happy, there at home and alone together—so snug and warm and jolly while the fat snowflakes spitting the windows kept reminding them how comfy it was inside. Who cared if company didn't get there for dinner to-morrow? Didn't need company to have a good time—have the best kind of good time with the family alone together, everybody loving everybody. Eric knew he was having a beautiful time—the best time he'd had since Dora came home—and it would be like this always if she'd be like this, and he'd love her more than any one in the world if she'd love him and forgive him for *that time*. . . . And why wouldn't she, if he told her how awful, *awful* sorry he was? Just because it was Christmas, she would, and to-morrow—a sort of little Christmas present for both of them—he'd go to her and say, standing up like a man and swelling out his chest: "Dora, I *done wrong* that time 'bout papa's letter—I *stole* it—that was a *sin*; but if y' can forgive me. . . ."

All the rest of the day he was groping for the exact,

right way to put it to her, weaving in the idea of peace on earth, good-will to men, or screwing up his courage, and in moments when that failed him, he revived it with the flame of moral inspiration rising from the ashes of Addie Rohmer.

Dora went to her study immediately after supper with her Christmas mail—pounds of it delivered by Olaf with a triumphant: "There, Miss Feruseth! Y' ain't never been dis'pointed yet when y' depended on Olaf to *git there!*" A score of presents, books, letters, all reminders of a past that, now it was brought back to her wholesale, seemed to have fallen to ashes, gray and sparkless. Sitting there with her chums' letters, it came home to her that she no longer yearned to go back—her life lay ahead; it lay *here*; it fulfilled itself according to her revelation, in self-sacrifice. And what success her first timid, half-perplexed efforts had already met with! No day in her whole life had been like this. Why, she almost loved Eric! There was something so simple and affectionate and sincere about him—*naïve*; nothing furtive or underhand; whatever he thought came bubbling right out, without thought of consequences. Distinctly engaging! You always knew where you stood with him, and she couldn't help realizing that she stood rather well with him—the shine in his eyes and the flush on his cheeks when she felt his biceps proved it. . . . Perhaps, she had been at fault in not praising his good points more—there was nothing morally reprehensible in praising what was praiseworthy—*that* wasn't "pampering," or "flattering a man's vanity," it was just being friendly and sincere to an affectionate, inexperienced, shy boy, needing to be appreciated and "brought out." The moment she had brought herself out to that view—and

the attitudes that go with it—she felt the same about “amusing” him as about amusing Polly, or any other child: one does it and drops it: one never stands committed to the child’s level as one does to the adult’s whom one companions on his terms: one doesn’t lower the same standards; doesn’t, perhaps, lower any “standards” to play with a child. . . . With conscious self-sacrifice as a tool, she had begun to build a new self, and to-morrow she would just quietly go to him and take his big paw in her hand saying: “Eric, I know you’re sorry about *that time* . . .” and all the rest that would come to her once they had started being really brother and sister, and for to-night. . . . Well, the good day was over; a filling day, sweet and mellow to the taste, rich in aroma for sense and soul; a good day to sleep on, saying,

“God’s in his heaven,
All’s right with the world.”

A pitcher of hot water, and then sweet dreams. She tiptoed to the kitchen for her water and heard as she softly opened the door, her mother’s voice, low but tense to Eric: “But if Dody was to forbid you to marry her now, what could she do? She knows well as you do the will says she’s got to approve of who you marry, or you get nothing—knows Dody has only to forbid you—then *she’s* in the position of makin’ you lose everything, and herself, too!”

Judging by the general tone and their attitudes, he and his mother had been thrashing arguments a long time. They sat with their backs turned to the door, Eric, his hands clinched, his forehead resting against his knuckles; his mother beside him holding an open letter, oblivious to everything.

Dora's first impulse was to slip away, unnoticed as she had come; her second, to let them know she had heard what wasn't perhaps meant for her, and she spoke out: "I'm sorry I overheard you, mother—I didn't know anybody was in here. I came for hot water——"

Her mother jumped at the sound of the voice behind her and exploded: "Oh! . . . Oh—it's *you*—I thought you were in bed," and after a moment's looking over her shoulder, during which she recovered herself, she turned back to Eric, whispering: "You better tell her now—it's as good a time as any."

He lifted his face, turning and staring at his sister, then dropped his forehead once more dejectedly against his knuckles sighing: "I can't. You tell her."

His mother beckoned Dora to the table. As she approached, Eric sank his head deeper on his clinched fists, with a gasp like a dry sob; then for some seconds no one made a sound—a silence palpitating for all of them with waves of dread. Mrs. Feruseth broke it in a strident voice: "Well, that Rohmer girl's got Eric into trouble after all—as I told you she would!"

Dora looked at her brother, still bowed before her, and all the outflow she had felt not five minutes before withdrew and solidified into something icy in her heart. She knew—and didn't know—what her mother meant, and asked to make sure: "How—'into trouble'?"

"The way I saw all along she was working to!" returned she, her voice still high and uncertain. "Over and over I've told you—said everything I could to open your eyes to what's goin' on—bound to go on with a woman like her at large in the community—you wouldn't listen—wouldn't believe I knew what I was talking about—called it gossip, and now it's happened! And her a woman over twenty-five and him a boy in his teens."

She paused a moment to brush her hand with tender reassurance over his hair, then flung out defiantly: "She gets no sympathy from *me*—no help from *me*—no encouragement from *me*, if that's what she's after! She ought to be *ashamed to tell it*, her a grown woman and him only a boy—if she had a rag of human decency she'd be too much ashamed *to tell it* on herself—her telling it proves *what* she is more than anything she ever done in her life—proves what your father said of her before Eric was born: 'common as dirt and coarse as horse-tail'—he wouldn't let her mix with the family even then—wouldn't let *you* play with her—" She had turned from Eric to Dora while she spoke, and thrusting the letter into her hand, ordered her, "Here, read it yourself—then you'll *know* what she is—confessed in her own words. Olaf brought it to-night with the mail. What a Christmas present!"

It was an illiterate scrawl on the cheapest paper: Why had Eric never been near her all these weeks? He knew her condition when he went away—had promised to marry her as soon as he got things settled so they'd have money to live on; she'd waited and waited until her "reputation now was good as ruined"; she was "four months along and all the neighbors talking"; didn't he mean to do right by her and his child? Well, she was rightly punished for loving and trusting him, but she'd done it because he was his father's son. If Eric went back on his promise, there was nothing for her but to kill herself and do it quick—she couldn't live if he didn't love her—wouldn't live after she'd been betrayed and deserted and left alone in shame and misery. An appeal calculated to reach the boy in every tender spot and force his hand to hasty action, but against which his mother was brandishing every weapon of argument she possessed,

As Dora read it, a deathly sickness pervaded her; the bitterness of the blasting of new-found hopes in her brother; nausea as she thought of Addie Rohmer and her coming into the family; and of this—of all sins, *this!* What was there to say? What could any decent, high-minded, moral, innocent girl say to a young man who had . . . done what he had done? And here he had been living under the same roof, eating at the same table with this sin on his conscience on top of the other, and all as unconcernedly— And here she'd been telling herself he was only a boy, really good at heart, and he was only a common seducer—her father's son a seducer; and it was because he was his father's son that Addie had trusted him—only to be seduced and deserted. . . . Through all the sweep of these thoughts, she was conscious of the kettle's contented singing on the range as if the world were good! What irony!

Her mother presently began garrulously, without waiting to hear what Dora had to say, perhaps trying to assist it to flow forth in support of her own side: "I always knew she was that kind—she was just smart enough to keep it concealed so she could still go among decent folks. But she led him into it, and now she tries to put the blame off on him. You can't tell *me!* Hussy! Bred in her bones! And then she goes and waits four months to tell him—waits till folks is talkin' and she knows how he'll feel forced to marry her. But she lies when she says he knew it when he left her and come home—he never had a suspicion till he got this letter to-night—not the ghost of a suspicion. Why, he near fainted under the shock, and I don't wonder. Her a woman and him only a boy. For my part, I don't believe it's his, anyways—you can't tell *me!*"

"Oh, it's mine all right—I know that," he groaned, lifting his white face for a moment and looking at his

sister, then at his mother. "Don't say that, mom'—Addie ain't so bad as to. . . . She didn't care fer no other fella like she did fer me."

The feeling prompting him then was a vague, inarticulate desire, deep in his being, to save a last remnant of self-respect: Addie had loved him only—her letter and coming child proved it; and to her he could return, still a thing of worth in some one's eyes when his sister had cast him off, as she would. He read it as he looked in her face: "Wretched creature, *go!* There is no excuse! This is no place for you!" Yet hardly had he spoken when he knew he didn't want to return to Addie, and felt as if he must shout at his sister, "Don't tell me to go! I can't go back—to that woman! I hate her—I despise her! I can't go—I can't go!" but all that came was a dry sob and he dropped his forehead against his clinched hands.

His mother sniffed derisively, though she changed her tack: "Even if it is yours, that's no excuse *for her*—she let you do as you pleased, and her a woman and you a boy. Shameless hussy! A woman of her age can't take care of herself deserves all she gets—and she gets nothing but utter contempt from *me*—utter contempt! And as for this talk about 'seducing' from a girl like Addie Rohmer—low-minded when she was a little thing in short dresses—your father saw it then and refused to allow her in the house with his children—as for *her* talkin' about being seduced by a boy she knew since he was a baby! . . . I remember her sittin' here in that very rocker one day, the old man brought her over to see your father about some business—money he wanted to borrow—but your father wouldn't let him have it—he had Addie with him, and she sat in that very chair holding you in her lap, a baby in long clothes—I can see her still, the way your skirts trailed down and drag-

gled on the floor, and the look she give when she asked me: 'It's a little boy, ain't it? I like little boys.' . . . And she was a big girl then—most old enough to have a baby herself, and now for her to be talkin' about *seduc-ing*! I know who did the seducing—if there was any; and I'm ready to tell her so to her face—tell her she was old enough to know what she was doing and she's got to take what's coming to her now, same as the rest. Eric, you've got no obligation to tie yourself up to that woman—and she knows it as well as I do."

Dora demanded coldly: "Do you mean that you—his mother—are counselling Eric to desert a girl he admits seducing?"

"Admits seducing?"

"He has just declared that the child is his!"

"Well, what of that?" retorted her mother. "Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't—but that's neither here nor there. I'll have to be shown first that he did seduce her—she knew all there was to know before he was born, I'll warrant you! As for the child's being his—why the boy's been home here for months and months; he's not set eyes on Addie since that day—the day before you sent Freddie Woodhull off—you can get the date from your check-book. So that proves one lie on her right off—that he knew what her condition was when he came home: she didn't know it herself! And as for him seducing her, as she's pleased to call it——"

She paused, fairly out of breath, and Dora shot the question: "Did you, Eric?"

"Yes." He supposed he was merely claiming the paternity of the child; he had no idea of all the dire significances Dora attached to "seducing"—the malice aforethought, the deception of innocence, the trust betrayed; and with his word, a new picture of Addie suddenly began to form in Dora's mind—Addie the sweet,

confiding girl, led astray from the paths of virtue. She was no longer "Addie the wolf"—she was "Addie the innocent." Something of the sisterhood of women rose in Dora's breast. That a man can use and fling aside—it was terrible, no matter who the woman; and an innocent, confiding woman, trusting her brother because he was her father's son! That shouldn't be! In her straight-up-and-down Puritanism she saw only the woman, seduced, deserted, and the child—her father's flesh and blood—stained from birth, her brother the culprit. If he didn't love Addie—so much the worse his crime! How could he hesitate a moment now to right the wrong he had done? Why didn't he sit up and say something like a man?

He sat there groping for words in which to tell how he no longer cared for Addie because a great change had come into his soul the night he stole and read his father's letter; how things that used to please him—songs the fellas sang and things Addie said and did—didn't please him any more. He'd been sort of—*affectionate*—with Addie, ages ago; and then she seemed to fade away after he came home—he didn't want to see her again—never would have seen her again if it hadn't been for this; he didn't like that sort of girl any more—liked one altogether different—a girl clean and white and far away—a girl with something mysterious about her that made you feel. . . . What was it Dora made him feel? If he could think of a word for it, and then tell her, she'd understand why he didn't want to go back to Addie. . . . couldn't . . . She stifled him. . . .

Mrs. Feruseth seemed to divine something of what was passing in both her children's minds, and it goaded her determination to fight to the last ditch to save her boy. She felt she'd die sooner than see him "thrown away" on Addie Rohmer, the one of all others as child,

girl, and woman his father had despised the most; felt it a duty owed the dead to prevent it. "You say you did—and it's to her interest to make you believe you're the first with her," she cried. "But how much does that prove—when you're dealing with a woman like her? I know that breed if you don't—I know what a woman like her is capable of—know their wiles and their lies. And even if it is your child—and you drunk at the time—you was drunk all the time you was hangin' round down there to Rohmer's ranch last fall and didn't know what you was doing or saying, as *I* can testify—even if it's your child twice over, for you to be tied for life to any such woman as Addie Rohmer—you a boy not barely nineteen—it's a sin! Yes, a sin—a wicked sin—it means your ruin, livin' with a creature of her stamp; a sin, and she knows it—it's why she wrote instead of comin' here—put it on paper—if she hadn't been desperate she'd never have put *that* on paper in the wide world!—she did it because she knew it was such a sin she didn't dare face *me*—nor your sister. She knew what she'd get if she tried to talk any of that stuff about seducin' to another woman—she'd be told she knew what she was after all the time, if you didn't! . . . What did she do? Never so much as looked at you while papa was living—hardly gave you a civil word when you stopped in there with Posey Burnham—you told me so yourself. But soon's she heard papa was dead, then she couldn't be sweet enough to you—wrote you how sorry she was. . . . Such a lie! She was glad he was out of her way. . . . But the minute she found out about the will, and how things were left, then she stood you off till she found out about Dora—you told me so yourself—that was one of the things got you so upset about Dora's bein' your gardeeen. Addie, she got her notions of the sort of woman she had to deal with, and then she began

puttin' ideas into your head—it was her, and no one else on God's earth put you up to all that foolishness about your wrongs and your rights. You had no more call to complain of rights and wrongs in papa's will than any of the rest of us, and you'd never have dreamed of doin' it if *she* hadn't nagged you into it to serve her interests: once *you* got money, she knew where *hers* would come from! I saw it plain enough if you didn't—I see her game now, if you don't. She thinks with you married and saddled with a family, Dora's bound in common decency to make you an allowance—and a big one; so she's waited till the last minute—fixed it so you've got to marry her and do it quick—to save the *family's reputation*! She knows you don't love her and never did—she couldn't get you that way—you've proved that by staying away from her—knows this is her only chance now—threaten to kill herself if you don't. Blackmail, that's all this is—any lawyer will tell her so—I'd tell her so if she came near enough so I could—tell her she's the lowest of the low, deserving not a ray of pity or sympathy—deserving to be cast out of a decent community. . . . Woman not fit for the commonest of the common to associate with, a lying hussy, coarse as the dirt beneath your feet—and she thinks herself fit to marry your father's son! Why, it's monstrous! She must be crazy—out of her head completely to write you such a letter as that and think you'll take any notice of it—or *her*. The fact that she'd write instead of coming is enough to condemn her as a woman without shame or virtue! *It will lay me dead in my grave to see my son married to a woman without shame or virtue—dead in my grave!*"

She put all the force of her being—her love and pride, her hope and fear for him—into those last words, and sank back in her chair, feeling weak but triumphant: he *must* be saved now from Addie Rohmer.

He had lifted his face and sat looking at his mother with a strange expression—she had excused him, forgiven him, backed him in his desire to be rid of Addie; he wanted to be rid of Addie—but not that way; not on those grounds—that it was only his money and not himself she was after. *That* wasn't so! Why, he hadn't any money and she always knew it—that five-pound box of candy he brought her once from Laramie—the only present he ever did give her, anyway—had “cleaned him out” to the last cent; and she told him she loved him for his generosity—wouldn't have cared if it had been a one-pound box—would rather it had been a cheaper box so he hadn't spent his last cent, but kept something for himself; a one-pound box would have showed just as well that he was thinking of her when he was 'way off there, and that was all she cared for—to know he was thinking of her, loving her, glad to get back to her. . . . His mother was wrong . . . but suppose his marrying Addie did lay her dead in her grave! . . . And suppose his not marrying Addie laid *her* dead in her grave? . . . And his child! . . .

Into their silence Dora thrust her cold, relentless question: “Do you mean, mother, that you are advising Eric to desert his own child?—your flesh and blood—your grandchild, and my father's—and leave it to go through the world nameless, with the stain of illegitimacy resting upon it—*and him?*”

Eric looked at her gratefully. The words were like a beacon-light across the tossing waters of his soul. He seemed to have been waiting for them; to have felt them somewhere, only he'd not quite put them together; felt them when he thought of Addie and his child, and how he couldn't go off and leave them—his father's son *couldn't*.

Up to that moment his mother hadn't given the com-

ing child a thought, except that it was "conceived in sin" and used to force her son into a hateful marriage; and as usual, she dodged the main issue, retorting: "I ain't convinced it is my own flesh and blood——"

"Well, *I am!*" For a moment Eric's eyes flashed and met hers; then both looked away. Each seemed to know in that brief instant that the other had been struck a deadly blow; that those three words had nailed their fate; and both recoiled.

And she thought she had saved him!

"Dear God!" The cry came from her involuntarily, piercing him like a knife, and involuntarily he reached out his hands to her—she was *mother*—Addie was nothing.

But she had already turned away and was pouring out her last despairing appeal to Dora. "What if it is his child—child conceived in iniquity and born of a low woman—is that any reason why he should have a millstone hung on his neck for life? Him only a boy and her a grown woman—him not carin' a rap for her nor she for him—and just for a piece of drunken folly, is he to be put fairly into the gutter—along with the gutter-snipe—that's all she is—to pay for it? And is a woman like her to be *rewarded* for her iniquity by bringin' her into our family? . . . If your father was only living . . . and thank God he didn't live to see this day! . . . But you're Eric's guardeen—you can refuse your consent—say you'll cut him off accordin' to the will—it gives you full right to act—if he marries against your wishes, he gets nothing and she knows it—she won't try to push this on him when you make her understand he gets none of the property. And once she does understand, she'll find some other way out of her difficulties—trust her—there's plenty of ways a girl like her knows how to manage, and that'll be the last you hear of Eric's seducin'

her—or anybody else, if there's no money in her provin' it. You got it in your hands now to save him: refuse your consent!"

"Do you think I would be party to such a sin—such a crime—as that?—deserting the woman he ruined and his child!" cried Dora, drawing herself up with indignation. "He must marry her."

Her mother visibly quailed, but found strength to protest: "Then he'll be ruined, that's all!—and you'll be party to a second piece of iniquity ten times worse than the first—the ruin of your own brother—your own flesh and blood, born of the same mother, nursed at the same breast. Sacrifice *him* to save *her* reputation! . . . She had none to save . . . people been talking about her since she was twelve years old—I know, for I've lived here, you haven't. Sacrifice *him* to give a name to a bastard . . . it may never see the light of day—even if he married her to-morrow. Do you think a woman her age with her pretensions—tryin' to get in to the best-standin' family in the community—be considered and received hereabouts and in Laramie as one of us, a Feruseth—do you think she's goin' to be caught with a short-term child—leave it to be said all over the county her first was born five months after she married? Not her—not if I know her; and I've known her since before you were born. . . . Her 'ruined' by him, indeed! The way you talk, you seem to think she's an innocent, confidin' little girl, instead of a—a wolf! It's a pity you didn't learn something about the *world* when you was to college—learn how it's *full* of Addie Rohmers layin' in wait for just such good-natured, affectionate, ignorant boys as Eric—boys with money and family position—trickin' and schemin', stoopin' to anything to entrap 'em into marriage . . . it's wicked how little you know about the world, and you *his* *guardeen*—

wicked! Because she's ruined is no reason why he should be ruined to save her—if one of 'em's got to be ruined, let it be the one who knew what she was about when she did it, not the one who can't even remember—let it be the one that was already ruined in birth—your father always said that no good comes of half-breeds, and you can't rely on 'em farther than you can see 'em—ruined in her reputation for truth and honesty and decent conduct—not a boy in his 'teens. *Let it be her, not my son!*"

"It is only in the lonely emergencies of life that our creed is tested," says William James; "then routine maxims fail and we fall back on our gods." Mother and daughter struggling to "save" Eric had each fallen back upon her gods—happiness, the mother's; conduct, the daughter's; and it was with their gods back of them that they confronted each other; with maternal love, whose cry was, "Nourish and shield"; with Puritanism, whose cry was, "Do right—though the heavens fall!" and Eric's own awakening to the meaning of sin was tipping the balance in favor of his sister's. He was telling himself in some dim recess of his mind: "I wanta do what's right by my child, anyway. . . . Mebbe I can sorta-kinda even things up this way, an' Dora'll see I ain't as bad as she thought. . . . But Addie—to tie up fer life to Addie!" He shuddered at that, and in his mother's pause appealed to his sister haltingly: "Couldn't I wait . . . an' see if it comes . . . like mom' says? . . . Mebbe it won't, an' then—she won't have no claim . . . there won't be no need fer me to tie muhself up . . . when I ain't ready . . ."

"And add another sin to this? Desert the woman who trusted and still trusts you? Risk your dying and leaving behind a nameless child of yours? Wait even

a day, now that you know and acknowledge the truth?" She stopped some seconds for his answer, but as he could say nothing, she commanded him: "You must marry her at once."

A curious guttural note had come into her voice with the last words, and as her mother heard it, she saw before her, more distinctly than she had ever yet seen him, James Feruseth in living flesh—the James whose inexorable law was righteousness, unswerving for feelings or circumstances, whose inexorable will enforced his inexorable law; and before that will an inner tide of her being sank and seeped away. All at once she felt feeble, helpless, and old—there seemed so utterly nothing left to say, nothing with which to stem the tide of the inexorable will that drove hers out and would drive arguments, entreaties, events before it regardless till its ends were fulfilled. Slow tears formed in her eyes and her words came in a whisper: "That means I lose my boy—my only son——"

Without noticing her, Dora and Eric continued staring at each other, she to read his acquiescence, he to read commutation of the life sentence she had just passed on him; and during that silent gaze something in her blood, like an elemental fiat from the very essence of her being, seemed to concentrate into determination and relentless power—a nameless vivid force she felt pour out of her compelling him to rectitude when she repeated: "You must marry her."

For a few seconds more he still looked at her, questioning, imploring, his whole nature in revolt. The image of Addie—coarse, loud, pretentious, tricky, vulgar, slovenly—stood like a wraith beside the woman who had come to mean to him beauty, purity, clarity of mind and heart, direct and disinterested purposes—everything that was choice and penetrated with the mystery of

womanhood—his bad angel and his good. And his good angel was giving him away to his bad angel! . . . He wondered if she knew what she was doing . . . what he could say to make her understand the dreadful fact . . . what anybody could say to stop her if she didn't stop after all his mother had told her. . . . Perhaps, if he tried again . . . could find just the right words. . . .

Before they came to his trembling lips her words fell on him for the third time, "You *must* marry her," with all the awful power of her will back of them, and he knew his fate was sealed.

Something gave way within him. His cry, "Oh, mom'!—mom'!" was wrenched from his depths as he held out his hands to her.

She gathered him to her breast with a smothered, "Yes, darlin'—mamma knows—mamma understands"

Next morning he rode away and married Addie Rohmer.

CHAPTER XXI

THE baby came in May.

Eric rode over with the news the day after, galloping in on a lathered horse, feeling all the world different, glowing. But something had happened just as he was starting that had helped the new-world feeling to bloom. Addie had begun at him, "Oh, I don' wantche to leave me," and he had been just a little sharp with her. It meant so awfully much to him to tell them at home, "My *son's* arrived!"—he could hardly wait to get those words out; it meant his exoneration in Dora's eyes, this named, acknowledged son! He'd add, "Eric Feruseth junior—nine and half pounds and all there!" So he had answered Addie hastily: "Why, I *gotta* go, Add'—I promised mom', an' she's crazy to hear the news—jes' settin' there waitin', expectin' every minute to see me come racin' in, like I said I would. Aw, say, don't go actin' up——"

"I don' wantche to leave me," she whined.

He felt he must get away from that house of pain or go crazy, and asked her reproachfully: "Wanta keep me here fer nothin'—after what I went through yes-tiddy?"

She laughed shrilly. "After what *I* went through, y' better say! What *you* went through! 'Twas *you* laid here, writhin' in agony! My Gawd—if that don't beat all—what *you* went through!"

For answer he gulped a big lump suddenly risen in his throat. It had been so terribly real to him, and she didn't appreciate. . . . She added: "So that's the

excuse fer to go an' leave me—when I wantche so much,” and his face softened.

“But it’s all over now—they ain’t nothin’ I can do. If y’d only be reasonable—” he grumbled, half minded to stay because she wanted him so much, yet irritated that she couldn’t see what it meant to him to race off with the news; meant to her, too. “Aw, say—y’ don’t want mom’ to worry fer fear y’ didn’t come through all right,” he hazarded in a wheedling tone; but she only whimpered back: “I’d ought to be more to you than what *they* are!—an’ here you go runnin’ off to leave me——”

The nurse at that moment brought the baby back from the other room where she had been washing it—a trained nurse in uniform, very positive, very respectful; the sort that knows her place, and also her rights and duties. Dora had sent the money for her sister-in-law to do the thing up in style. The nurse glanced at him and spoke in her quiet, uniformed way that always took the lead over mere husbands in these exacting hours: “Mr. Feruseth, it won’t do to fret your wife now—it may hurt the milk and make the baby sick.”

He turned very red. For a woman to speak to him about the milk!—never had anything so embarrassed him. He’d “said things” to girls—to “that sort of girls you could say things to”—but when this woman—this half nun—spoke of milk, he didn’t know which way to turn his blushing cheek. And milk was merely professional to her—that was what made it so. . . .

He rose to the professional. A new sense of dignity pervaded him—she made him feel himself the gentleman. Naturally, she’d feel free to speak to him without reserves because she saw he was so . . . Flushing with pleasure, he faltered humbly: “I hadn’t thought o’ that.”

She stepped to the bedside, opened his wife's night-dress and gave the baby the breast, laying everything all out smooth and connected with such beautiful precision, and murmuring: "The little dear! What a real Wyoming boy!"

He grew redder. It went all over him to see his child fed, and the nurse so professional—not making anything out of it at all, his being there and looking on! Really, she must think him—very nice!—or she wouldn't do it.

She was running along amiably: "A little bouncing bruiser like this young man needs the best of milk! Strong!—just put your finger in his little fist and you'll see what he is already!"

She moved off, and he stooped over and thrust his finger into the tiny hand groping over Addie's full breast. The hand closed on his finger and clung. Something ran all the way up his arm from it and into his heart—the most wonderful feeling. He moved his own big paw up and down; pretended to pull it away; but the tiny hand clung tighter.

"Why! Will y' lookka *that*!" he beamed, almost overcome with astonishment and emotion. "I never see the beat. He is a regaler little bruiser like y' say. He knows what *he* wants!"

Addie smiled up at him and he back at her. It was their wonderful moment out of the whole of life when the heavens opened and spread peace about them.

"An' won't mom' be crazy over him!" he breathed.

Addie still smiled.

"It'll make everything—all right."

She knew what he meant and whispered, "Yes," sighing.

"It's why I'm so anxious to tell her soon's I can, Addie, fer soon's she sees him, an' thinks how he's

mine, why she'll feel so—so all right . . . 'bout some other things, when she sees with her own eyes how it's turned out. She'll come over here to-morrer—I betche she don't wait a day to kiss him, her first gran'-child!"

Addie's face clouded. "I don't want Dora comin' here."

"She won't. I'll fix that, if it needs fixin'—don't you worry now. But she won't come anyways, not if I ast her to."

The cloud deepened on Addie's face—he had struck a wrong note. She preferred to think that Dora couldn't because forbidden, not that she wouldn't if invited. Then all at once it occurred to her that she would like to have Dora come just to flaunt this son at her; she felt the superiority of motherhood; the one superiority she could ever hope to hold up against Dora.

"I don't see why she wouldn't come—if she's *ast*," she mumbled, looking down at the baby while she shifted him to a better position. "If yer mother comes—and Polly comes . . . if she ain't ast, o' course . . . but if she's ast to come. . . ."

"Mebbe she would," he responded warmly, with a quickened insight into her feelings, and a desire not to strike another wrong note. "I'm only guessin', not sayin' exactly what she'll do when it comes right down to me askin' her: 'Dora, won't y' come over an' see the sorta-kinda *colts* we're raisin' on my ranch?' I dunno why she wouldn't say 'Yes' right off—I dunno why she wouldn't wanta see him soon's she could—he's her own nephew—she'd ought to wanta see him, an' he's somethin' to see now, betcher life! Mebbe her an' Polly'll both come with mom'—then we'll be the whole family all together—gramma, papa, mamma, aunty, son!—three generations. . . . Great Scott—what a

fist the fella's got! He'll be knockin' me down 'fore I know where I'm at! An' hear him eat, will y'?"

The nurse, anxious to be rid of the husband and attend to her own duties in peace—and you can't do that with a big six-footer who takes up all the spare space, rambling about after you and asking questions—came bustling up to the bedside, smiling down at her charges.

"Now, Mrs. Feruseth, you and I are ready for *our* séance! Send the proud young father packing off home to his mother with the glad news so's we'll have the house all to ourselves. This is the time we always have to get rid of the husbands"—she threw him a pleasant look, a little arch but not familiar—just friendly, and as if she were siding with him while pretending not to and secretly helping him to make an easy "getaway"—"and I'm always thankful when there's a mother to ship them off to. When there isn't a mother to rush home and tell. . . Mrs. Feruseth, you wouldn't *believe* what a time I've had with some new fathers the day after! Why, once when I was—" She stopped abruptly and gave Addie a look that said, "This is a little yarn for you and me in private," and another look that said, "Send him off so I can tell it," and laid out her towels and other articles on a chair in an ostentatious way that said: "I'm waiting for the gentleman to go."

Addie lapped up the suggestions! Of course, a woman didn't want her husband hanging about the day after, thinkin' *he'd* been the one laid out in agony! She wanted to cuddle up with her baby and let her trained nurse fuss over her, and tell about that time when she was. . . . Addie winked at the nurse to show she understood, and, "Don't be long, Eric," was the way she backed down gracefully.

"No. I'll race both ways."

"I didn't mean fer y' to kill yerself."

He bent over and kissed her on the brow.

"Kiss him!" she ordered, hunching her shoulder and arm and lifting the little head with its noisy mouth still at work.

He hesitated. "'Fraid I'll squish him—he's so little," he muttered sheepishly; then, seeing the nurse's back turned, he brushed his lips hastily across the downy head, so soft, so warm, but when he disengaged his finger, it hurt somewhere in his heart.

He rode across the range, furiously for the first mile, then at a steady lope. How wonderful everything was! May and green grass, and haze and a soft wind all a-tingle with the perfume of sage and plains and bird songs and flit of wings. He came to a group of cattle, cows with calves, mostly nursing. Once he would have "whooped" them out of his way, and laughed to see the calves drop the teats and scud off affrighted. Now he rode around them carefully. He noticed a calf butting its mother's udder to make her let down the milk. "Go to it, buster!" he encouraged as he dashed by, and he felt like giving that cow a good hard whack on the back to make her let down her milk—didn't she know any better than that?—the little fella would get sick if she didn't give him all he wanted—he had to grow.

Though fatherhood as a responsibility still sat lightly upon him, fatherhood as a sentiment was stirring his soul to new depths, bringing up strange thoughts and questions on the world and its meanings. The stirring had begun months back with a frightened, "How did it happen?" when he got Addie's letter at Christmas time; but the question now teasing at his mind was, "How could it happen that a living human being with a soul could come from one act?—with a soul, mind you,

that would live forever! Where did the soul come from? Did God make it and thrust it inside that baby's body? When? Just as the baby was born, or a while before, or after? And how did it get inside and why couldn't you remember anything about it afterward?" Wasn't it queer about souls! He had asked Addie once what she thought—she was the mother and ought to know. She said he made her shiver—don't talk about souls and ghosts and things like that. Ough! What was the use of botherin' 'bout anything y' couldn't see? The baby came—that was all there was to it, and trouble enough, too, jes' takin' care of it, without botherin' yer head 'bout whether its soul didn't fit right. Go git in some wood an' keep her from freezin' to death, er catchin' such a cold she'd have a miscarriage, an' she guessed the baby's soul'd be there an' fit.

He never spoke to her about his secret thoughts again; he couldn't after that snub, and the barrier between her, the mother, the repository of the mystery, and him, the father, troubled him. He wondered if she knew and wouldn't tell, and again he had that sense of the cryptic there is in every woman's soul. She was his, and not his, if she knew and wouldn't tell. "But mebbe she don't know no more about it than I do!" he suggested by way of explanation. "Only, she don't want me to know she don't know."

"Oh, well, y' don't hafta know it all to be somebody!" thought he, scanning the horizon for a sight of his old home, and swelling out his chest with a big breath. The nurse, now—she thought he was somebody; showed it, too; so perhaps Dora might begin to feel a little different—she might see something new in him that wasn't there when he was home . . . when he robbed her of his father's letter and read it. . . . At the word "father" such a pang went through him that

he reined up involuntarily and sat motionless, staring into the cobalt dome. A revelation had come with the pang, a burst of understanding. Sweeping upward out of the depths of his being through the crust of differences and racial antagonisms came the urge of the elemental tie, the common human experience—fatherhood. On that ground they were at last united. His revelation began with the fervent words: "Oh, papa, I wisht y' lived to see the little tike I got at home!" and had been followed by a second thought: "Why, he's *your* flesh an' blood, too—the life you give to me, I've only handed on to him!" It was a wonderful thought, that of life passing on and on, binding in lines all the generations of humanity, and from the little soft atom of it that had just clung to his finger, through him, through his father, his grandfather, he felt the line stretching back and back in a limitless procession of stalwart men who had handed on the sacred fire, fought the good fight, had stood up and "been somebody," and had made not only their own place in the world at large, but had built for the generations to follow. A new picture of his father rose before him—the Builder. Even though he was still five miles from home, Eric knew he was on his father's land—*his* land—his son's land some day! He thrilled as he looked about him at the familiar acres, stretching almost to the horizon. "An' papa come here to the wilderness, an ordinary pioneer, an' done it all! All by himself, too, with nobody backin' him an' puttin' up the capital, ner helpin' him!" With that came a pang of remorse. Tears rose in his eyes. From his inmost heart he breathed out: "Papa, I'd give a year off muh life right now if I could talk to y' jes' five minutes an' tell y' how diff'runt I see things, an' how I wisht I'd acted diff'runt toward y' all along . . . when I was a little chap,

always inta mischief . . . an' 'fore y' died all alone down there to Laramie, an' me cuttin' round with a bunch o' fellas I shouldn't ought of went with."

He was startled out of his reverby by a tear rolling down his cheek; dashed it off with a sheepish exclamation, "Me cryin'—of all things!" and shouted at his horse: "G'wan, there! Whatche stoppin' fer?"

He saw Dora with Polly and Olaf a long way from the house staking out the site for new corrals and a cattle-shed. He was glad they were out there—it meant that his mother was alone inside—and he didn't hail them but dashed on to the house to see her first. She was grinding coffee and had heard nothing else when he burst in upon her with: "The baby's come—a boy!" and as she jumped up in a fright at this unexpected apparition, he swept her off the floor into his arms and felt her sob against him.

"How you frightened me! I didn't know what it was—a bear——"

"Oh, mommsie! It's a *boy*! Nine an' a half pounds, and all there!"

"A boy!" she gave another sob—her own boy was given back to her in those words, that strong clasp, and the cheek that he stooped down to press against hers. "A boy—a Feruseth!—I'm so glad!"

"I knew y'd be glad—I wanted to tell you first 'fore I told anybody else—so's y'd understand how every-thing's all right now, between you and I anyhow. . . . Why, mommsie! Whatche *cryin'* fer?"

"Because I'm so glad——"

"That's a funny way to show it!" He kissed her cheek fondly. "An' yer first gran'child, too."

"I'm just a foolish old woman, crying because I'm a grandmother—time to lay me away on the shelf."

"Aw, mommsie! Who's talkin' of layin' y' 'way on the shelf!" he chided. "Why, I want y' more'n I ever wanted y' in muh life!"

She smiled then through her tears at the way he had taken her bait. She was crying because she knew she was still his one and only mother, but she couldn't have confessed it, revealed the weeks of suffering hidden in her heart, even to him. "Well, since I ain't to be laid on the shelf—" she wiped her face with her apron, drew him to the lounge, saying as they seated themselves, "I'm so glad it's over—such a relief—I been worryin' night an' day the last week; an' not hearin' . . . she said she was expectin' it the last of April, an' when the whole week went by——"

"But he got here all right! An' such a bruiser! Hung onta muh finger with his little fist so's I 'most couldn't git it away from him! Nurse says he's a perfect child—boy——"

"I prayed for a boy for you," she beamed.

He gave her a little hug. "Oh, mom', y' don't know how I feel! I don't hardly know muhself when I look in the glass."

"Who should, if not your mother? It's how I felt when you came."

"Well, you were muh mother—they're bound to feel—set up. But did papa feel like—like I do when I come?"

That was something she could never tell while life lasted. If James Feruseth had felt joy at the birth of his children he had not shown it even with the first—it had frosted something between her husband and herself that had never revived in her heart for him; a frost that had spread with each child, and brought added bitterness to all their lives as the years wore on. "I bear them in pain and sorrow—and he can't even

say he's glad they're his and not another man's. They might be another man's for all the pride and joy he shows in them!" In not showing he had wounded her in her deepest instincts and tenderest feelings; wounded her pride and the mid-Victorian sentiments with which she had been imbued in her girlhood home of what was due in recognition and respect from a man to the honorable and to-be-honored mother of his children. For months before the first came she had dreamed a picture she had once seen—a father looking across the little new babe nestled on his wife's arm and saying to her, "Ours, Dolly!" and had secretly lived forward to that precious moment. And when it came, James had looked, not at her, but at the baby; then he had said, "I want her called after you, Dora," and smiled at the baby; not a look for the mother that had brought him this gift from the very jaws of death; then he had tiptoed clumsily out of the room, knocking over a chair as he went. She never knew that his heart was so near bursting with sympathy and joy he had been afraid to look at the mother of his child—afraid his self-control might give way in spite of him and he'd excite her when she most needed calm; and that he had run into the chair because his eyes were full of tears. At first, she had been only disappointed, hurt in her feelings, but hoped for "more notice" when the child was older, telling herself men couldn't be expected to take so much interest in little babies; it was with Eric's birth that she began to be hurt in her pride and to regard the father's coldness toward his first-born son as "a slight put upon her." She could excuse him for not making a fuss over a girl—men often didn't, and out in the wilderness men needed sons first; but "if he couldn't make a fuss over a boy—not a single word more than he had said for the girl—it showed lack of proper respect for the mother that

bore him the boy in pain and sorrow; showed *how little* he appreciated *her*—any other woman would have served his purposes just as well.” In her happier moods she didn’t believe it—knew to the bottom of her heart she was “the only woman” in the world to him. Still, her wounds bled on occasion in secret until he died. Now with her son’s question, the vision of his birth-hour rose from its grave in her heart, bitterer by contrast with his exuberant expressions of joy than the hour itself as she had lived it. The very shine in his eyes, the purr in his voice, were telling her in trumpet tones what she had missed out of life, and with it came a stinging jealousy that Addie had it—“that woman—common as dirt and coarse as horse-tail.” She asked quickly: “How’s Addie?”

“Fine! Quantities of milk—an’ the little tike needs a lot, nurse says.” It seemed all right and natural to talk about milk to his mother, but he cast an uneasy glance at the door to see if his sisters were coming, before he went on: “But she had an awful hard time—*awful!* Oh, mom’, y’ don’t *know* what I went through! I didn’t stay to the end—the doctor, he made me go out when things got to where they’s goin’ to give her the chloroform—didn’t want me round, though I was willin’ to stay—I wouldn’t a-went off an’ left her no matter how I was sufferin’ if him an’ the nurse hadn’t a-sent me. . . . But two hours pret’ near killed me—I can tell that fer a truth. I hadda go an’ lay out on the hay up to the corrals—an’ *sick!* . . . Well, nemmind—it’s all over now—we come through all right, an’ yer new grandson’s here an’ worth all he cost; but I wouldn’t go through it again in a hurry—it’ll take me some time fer to git over havin’ one baby!”

He laughed at his own sally while he wiped the damp off his brow, and though she was immensely amused,

she told him seriously: "It upsets some tender-hearted men more than it does their wives to have a baby."

"Tender-hearted" pleased him. He stowed it away to tell Addie, while he exclaimed: "Well, it near killed *me*! If that's what tender-hearted means, I guess I better git tough!" and under the softening influence of the word, he confided: "An', mom', y' don't know how glad I was I married her! I kep' a thinkin' while she kep' a pullin' on muh hands, 'S'pose she had to go through it all alone an' me not there to help her!' An' when I see the little tike—he was all washed an' dressed then—an' thought how he mighta had no name, an' how I mighta brung disgrace on him with muh—foolishness!—oh, mom', y' don't know"—he drew her close to him, and laid his cheek against her hair, whispering—"y' don't know how glad I am I done right that time an' married Addie."

For a moment, the silence became strained—both remembered only too vividly how she had fought against his marrying Addie; but in this wonderful blooming of his heart, he couldn't bear any cloud between himself and his mother—he wanted her to understand and sympathize with him to the uttermost depths of him. Oh, she *must* feel it all as he did! And after that strained moment, while dislike and jealousy dominated her, she rose to her occasion—mother-love poured unstinted and enveloped him, all he was, all he had done and hadn't done, all he would be.

"I'm glad—now," she admitted with more than her usual generosity, squeezing his free hand in both hers to make him feel her gladness. "You're a good man—a credit to your father. I don't say you wasn't foolish, but you was only a boy, and you've made wrong right in the sight of all. She'd ought to appreciate it—she knows if anybody does that there ain't many young

fellows about here would have acted the man when it come to the scratch of marryin' a girl after they'd got all they wanted without, and when they'd done it, they wouldn't of quit drinkin' the way you done—braced up—took hold to make something out of themselves——”

“Wait till y’ see what I’m goin’ to do,” he interrupted briskly and swelled out his chest. “That’ll be somethin’ worth while to talk about! So fur, I been only mowin’ grass—now I’m goin’ to dig in an’ turn sod, an’ you jes’ watch the dirt fly, fer they’ll be some doin’s when this little old Eric gits his little old fist right onta the job! I guess y’ll find I’m a chip off’n the old block, all right—Dora, she didn’t git all the good stuff there was in papa—there was still a little of the real thing with the punch to it when he made me, an’ now it’s goin’ to punch a place fer the little tike till he’s big enough fer to punch his old dad. An’ *he’s* got it in him, too—don’t y’ worry! Why, his little fist—I couldn’t hardly pull muh finger away—couldn’t hardly make him leave go without hurtin’ him! No time at all, he’ll have a bunch o’ knuckles like this here, then, *whoopée!* Let her fly! Zip!”

He shot his fist out at the air, and with the arm still around her, hugged her with such a burst of strength and vitality she was sure she felt her ribs cracking. She wouldn’t have cared—she would have bragged of broken ribs got that way. Oh, if his father had only been a little more like him!—had ever once in his serious, self-restrained, unemotional life crushed her to him in fierce animal joy with one arm while he punched the whole world with the other! James, who had been a sedate, mature man when she had been only a girl; James the unromantic; James the good! And against that picture of unromantic good there was now set youth at

the moment it burst into manhood, all ablaze with new powers, courage, zest, dash, flame of the elemental fires. She felt something pour over her—a man's will to do, to fight, to master, to have and to hold, to create and enjoy, to express himself in action and impress himself on the world. It was like feeling air charged with electricity, like feeling a gush of the primeval creative forces which had made all things in the beginning. As she had seen her girlhood resurgent in Dora, so now her early married years returned: in the man-person of her son she saw alive the dream-husband she had once secretly cherished in a hidden chamber of her heart never opened to James, the unromantic good. And this man beside her was bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh; she had made him; she had bought and paid for him with pain and love; she had dreamed him, babe, child, youth, and man, and he had come true.

She felt within her a deep emotion rather than words, a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction, and sat there absorbing him thirstily, what he was, what he felt and so exuberantly expressed, what he would some day be in the community, adding new credit to his father's name, what he meant of strong, fine, loving, gentle, sturdy things—a nourishing drink that seemed to feed and replenish her withering body, her hungry heart, and the very fibres of her being down to the silent depths where brooded the mother-powers that had brought him forth to the world—*hers*.

She knew it was her turn to say something, but couldn't speak a word. Fortunately, her silences never disturbed him, and he found this one only an opportunity and a call for a fresh outburst at her. "Oh, mommsie, mommsie!" he gushed. "Dearest little mommsie ever lived! I wanta put y' right in muh pocket an' run off home with y'—I can't hardly wait fer y' to

see him. Fer, mommsie—y' know I been thinkin', me bein' your son, an' him bein' mine, why, it makes sorta-kinda—*ours*—ours once removed, but thez a little bit of him that's jes' fer you and I to keep 'tween ourselves an' say how he's to be treated now an' what he's to be when he grows up, ain't there?"

"Ours, Dolly!" The words of her dream had been said at last; and when age was taking her little all, life—and sin—gave her back what she had lost from youth—the blessed experience of sharing love with love. To hold her son's baby while he leaned caressingly above them both!—her arms ached for it. Trying to tell him how she too could "hardly wait to see it," she choked on a sob and broke down, hiding her face in her hands. At that moment Polly came prancing in with a shout, "Hello, Eric!" Dora visible just behind her, and he rose and stepped forward to screen his mother until she could recover herself, answering back: "Well, hello yerself. Heard the news? You're an aunty. I gotta new baby."

"A baby! Where's it at?" she screamed, jumping at him and catching his hand.

"Y' might look in muh pocket fer it," he chaffed.

She dived her hand in and then gave him a slap. "You mean ole thing, you! 'Course y' didn't fetch it with y'—an' tell me to look in yer pocket fer it! But where's it at? When did it come? What's it like? Boy or girl?"

She kept up her bombardment of questions while he and Dora reached out and clasped hands above her, looking into each other's eyes, yet neither saying a word. As he saw her then, all live and tingling with health, she seemed to him like the Spirit of the Range in its May green and gray, with its soft kissing wind, its tameness and its wildness, its plentiful sky and its

difficult distances, its beauty and its remoteness, and, as she looked back at him, something like mystic flame seemed to sweep from his hand-clasp into her—life—the joy and sacredness of giving life. He had it—and a woman like Addie, *she* had a little babe nestling now at her heart, at her breast nursing, or perhaps asleep on her arm. Dora felt her bosom swell at the thought of that tiny thing nestling and depending for its very life on her; then felt a great surge of jealousy. How monstrous that she should be childless, and Addie have this transcendent experience, and Eric, too. His face was alight with it. . . . Joy. . . . The mystery of fatherhood. . . . Awakening. . . . And for her, only duty and abstract ideals, a bleak and wintry heart shut off from everything, even from life itself, in the midst of a world of love and joyousness, mystery and awakening she might not partake of. "It's not fair—it's not fair!" her bleak heart was crying out while she tried to think of kindly, appropriate words to say. Polly saved the silence by shouting up at her brother, "Why don't you answer me, you mean ole Eric-man? I ast—are—you—glad—you—gotta—baby?" and for punctuation, drew off and lunged at him with her small fist. He caught it in his big paw, still holding Dora's hand with his other, and thus for a moment the three of them stood joined hand in hand, he towering above them, and in a voice that was almost solemn he answered: "Yes, I'm glad—so glad I can't hardly talk about it. It's the greatest day of muh life."

CHAPTER XXII

EXCEPT in natures built on a Puritan foundation, ineffable hours carry with them the seeds of our destruction. Joy turns to license; license ends in madness. Thus Eric. His sudden expansion of latent feeling under the influence of fatherhood—the ideal of “the builder” that had come to him on the plains when he had thought of his father, the sense of new powers with which to create a worthy future for himself and his son, and above all the sense of his cleansing in the eyes of mother and sister—all this needed more and wider expression than he had found vent for on his trip home;—feelings that Addie, basking in her new sense of importance with a baby at one ear, and a trained nurse buzzing at the other, didn’t in the least respond to. Under the united influence of baby, nurse, woman to cook in the kitchen, new clothes, and plenty of money with which to meet the occasion in comfort, not to say elegance—all furnished by Dora’s generosity, which Addie chose to ignore and explain away—she found her husband and his ebullient emotions over her and the baby a bore and a nuisance. He not only filled all the empty space in her small room with his big clumsy body, but he seemed to fill the entire house. When he wasn’t sprawled out beside her watching the baby nurse and chortling: “Lookka that, will y?” every time it crooked its little finger or blinked its little eye, she still heard him tramping about, knocking into stray chairs, his head so high in the air he couldn’t see where he was going, and whistling or singing out of sheer joy; and it got on her nerves. She

"wanted quiet for once in her life," she said; but what she really wanted was, in the intervals of dozes and fussings, to have the nurse sit by, entertaining her with choice tidbits about women's diseases and men's sins. It was a rare opportunity, and one that wouldn't return for a long time; in fact, "Never again—not if I know my business," she confided to the nurse. "I've had my fill o' this sorta thing, now you betcher!" So she began grumbling at Eric within five minutes of his getting home, cutting right into his enthusiastic description of how his mother and sisters had taken the news, and how all right everything was: "I don't see what makes you so noisy. I ain't *deef*—you don't need fer to holler it inta muh ears like you thought I was, neither . . . wake the baby . . . git him cryin', anyways . . . men ain't got no consideration . . . if you ain't got none fer me, y'd ought to have some fer him . . . scare him inta convulsions. . . ."

"I'm awful sorry—I didn't mean no harm; didn't know I was talkin' s' loud to hurt anybody," he muttered, half under his breath; and whispering the rest of what he had to say, he lumbered out, hurt, disappointed, ashamed. The nurse followed him to whisper: "Don't mind her, Mr. Feruseth—they're all like that the first few days—don't know what they're saying—don't mean it the way it sounds. Completely upset, you know. And you couldn't expect a woman to be herself all at once—not after what she went through yesterday. You understand."

She put a slight caressing accent on the "you" that made him flush and feel large as he had in the morning when she talked with him, and he said: "Of course I do!" giving her one of his winning smiles. His dampened ardor bubbled up afresh under the influence of her sympathy, and he had a momentary impulse to take her

in his arms and kiss her—because she understood him so perfectly. But even as he looked at her white-robed form, she seemed to dissolve and he saw Dora in her place: it was Dora he wanted to take in his arms—Dora who understood him—or something stirring deep in his soul—as no one, not even his mother had understood him. Some invisible barrier had suddenly melted between them as he had held her hand, and he knew that she understood—that was why she had not said anything—she knew she didn't have to, because *he* understood! He could put his big arms around her and say: "Dora, I'm awful sorry 'bout papa's letter—I see things awful diff'runt——"

Addie called out fretfully: "What are you two whisin' about so secret? Always something goin' on behind my back—an' here's the baby still awake. It would seem 'zif I'd ought to have *some* care—at such a time."

The nurse gave him a knowing look and whispered: "You see how restless she is. I've done everything . . . just nerves. You mustn't mind, but you can't wonder at it, after all the chloroform she had—it'll take her some time to get over the effects."

She started toward the door, but he put a detaining hand gently on her arm and stammered: "W-what had I better do? Seems like—I'm too big fer the house—I jes' worry her bein' round. Guess I'd ought of stayed over to mom's to-night an' give her an' you a chancet fer to git straightened out, but I was in such a hurry to git back an' see . . . I mean, I was 'fraid she'd be wantin' me fer something—she didn't like me leavin' . . . but whatever you say . . ."

Addie had pushed herself up in the bed to look through the door over the foot-board, and got a glimpse of her husband's hand on the nurse's arm; but the surge of

anger she felt dissolved into self-pity as she fell back on her pillow with a sob. The nurse, who had seen her do it and shrewdly guessed what was likely to follow, hurried in to her, unceremoniously shutting the door in Eric's face. She didn't want him to hear any more than was actually necessary, for she had come to like him awfully, big, lumbering, tender-hearted boy that he was; and using the excuse that she was "plenty old enough to be his mother," she being thirty-four and he just twenty, she was allowing herself a considerable volume of very feminine interest and tender-heartedness, and telling herself that she "only felt sorry for him because he was thrown away on a creature like that when there were so many good women in the world who would have loved and appreciated him, and have been able to see the splendid man—like his father—he would make once he grew up; and wasn't it the irony of all things that with so many refined, good girls forced to take what they could get, or stay old maids, that Rohmer girl could take her pick and get the best in the county!"

Addie was already whimpering: "To think that he's makin' love to another woman under my very nose—an' takin' this time to do it when I'm laid out helpless. First went off an' left me to go home to his mother——"

"Tut, tut—making love, nothing!" soothed the nurse briskly, at the same time pulling the bedclothes over Addie's shoulder and taking up the baby. "You—with his baby—jealous of an old thing like me—old enough to be his *mother*. Well, I see there's some hope for me yet—if you think me fascinating enough at my age to catch a boy of his!"

"Oh, you—I wasn't thinkin' about you—you're all right."

"Well, I like that," chaffed the nurse airily. "Make me a pretty compliment in one breath and take it back

in the next—just as I'm eating it for peaches and cream. . . . Well, Master Eric, oo sees now what sort of muzzer oo's dot!—an' when she tells oo oo's de mos' captivat'in' 'ittle baby in de whole world, dont's oo b'lieve her: she's *only foolin'*—dat's all she's doin'—only foolin' oo wit' pitty compliments when she don't mean a word of 'em."

She worked this off with a skill that left Addie guessing whether she had given offense or not; and offending this competent, entertaining nurse was the last thing Addie meant to do—just then. So she protested warmly: "I wasn't thinkin' of you a-tall—*you* could git any man you set out after, young or old, married er single! If you ain't married a'ready it's 'cause you ain't seen the man you fancy. I betche y' broke hearts enough the last ten years to fill a bushel basket! It was *him* I was thinkin' of when I see him with his hand on yer arm."

"Him, nothing!" retorted the nurse. "He ain't the kind to make love to anybody but his wife. I know men—I don't know who'd be likely to know 'em better, see-in' 'em the way I do. His hand on my arm! Why, he was holding me back to ask what he'd better do, go or stay, while you're so nervous and upset—poor dear woman, as you've got good and plenty of cause to be, and he knows it, and only wants to do what's best for you."

"Cause—I should think yes," snapped Addie. "I got more cause than jes' this here—more cause than you know, er anybody else. Big, lubberly boy, fillin' the house with his noise—sometimes seems like I'll go crazy if I gotta see any more of him. Oh, I'm sick of it—sick of it all—of everything—of the whole world! Stuck away in a hole like this here ranch—see nobody from one week's end to the next but him——"

"You've got the baby now—finest child I ever saw

... ess oo is, so oo is!" she crooned. She finished attending to him and was smoothing him out ready to give back, but paused to cuddle her face against his. She always had a large warm flow for new-born babes, but this one, because of its father, unusually appealed to her. "Ess oo is a beauty—cutest 'ittle sweety-weety I ever did see in all my life, so oo is!" And then she laid him on Addie's arm and gave him his supper.

Addie smiled for a moment, but the smile faded and she looked up with a frown, blurting out: "*He* makes me wonder more'n ever what I married *him* fer!" She indicated the baby with a shrug of the shoulder, and her husband with a jerk of her head in the direction of the closed door, on the other side of which he still waited for the nurse, gloomily undecided as to what to do next.

"Why you married him? Because you loved him!" cheered the nurse, determined more than ever to maintain the fiction that she "knew nothing of their private affairs."—A general professional pose on her part, and an asset she had already turned to account with Eric, who was convinced—and relieved—that she "didn't suspect anything out of the way." Addie, however, gave her a suspicious look; then decided to play to the lead and sneered: "Huh—*love*! Much love—boy like him! Love don't cut no ice once yer married if they ain't nothin' to go with it. An' the way we both been treated by that sister o' his'n ever since!—you wouldn't b'lieve it if I was to tell you—it ain't *human*."

"There, there, my dear, you must *not* let yourself get excited," urged the nurse. "It's bad for baby—bless his little heart, see how he eats! He's a credit to both of you—these children of very young fathers sometimes turn out the best and handsomest of the lot."

Addie gave her another sharp, suspicious look as she asked: "You think he looks like him?—er like me? which? I can't see a line of Eric in him—not a line. . . . An' I don't wanta, neither," she suddenly flared. "I'm sick o' the whole blame business o' marryin' him—I hate him an' his whole blame fam'ly! Whaddid I ever marry inta 'em fer, when here I coulda married Posey Burnham if I'd of waited—he was dead crazy over me an' I was too blind to see it; an' we'd of went to Laramie er Denver to live—like folks, not like cattle—been somebody—gone to shows an' things an' had some decent clo'es to go in, instead o' me here cookin' day an' night to keep him filled up, an' all the thanks I git fer it is, 'Mom' always done it so an' so—mom' makes a quart o' chicken gravy, why can't you?' . . . Listen to him now! That's how it is the whole time when he's round—knockin' over everything he comes near, an' grouchin' if I say a word."

Unconscious of these animadversions, though he had noted the rising of his wife's voice—for through some innate delicacy he had moved away as far as possible when the nurse shut the door on him, that he might not hear what was evidently not meant for him—he had stood gazing out of the window at the coming twilight, until there seemed no immediate prospect of the nurse's return, and he had just betaken himself to the corrals to look after his stock, noisily thumping into a chair as he went out. For once he didn't swear—he was too solemnly happy; he didn't even whistle as he made his way to the stall where he had put up his horse, but his fingers fairly itched to fling on the saddle and ride and ride—ride home and talk with Dora. She had understood how he felt—that he had a son—a little creature with a soul. . . . What was a soul? . . . Where did it go when you died? . . . He leaned against the shed

door and gazed yearningly in the direction of his old home. The stillness that so often comes at dusk lay over the plains, and as far as his eye could reach, nothing stirred except the twinkle of the scarce stars pricking lazily through the pale sky. He knew none of their names—he had no “friends among the stars” as his sister had—but he had always loved to watch them steal into the sky at twilight, first one by one, like scouts finding the way, then in a minute, whole flocks of them, all twittering. But while he stood there, the dusk crept over the range and a coyote began barking in the distance—a lonesome sound that filled him with melancholy, a nameless emptiness, and isolation from his kind. Instantly he wanted his kind—wanted a human voice more than anything in the world; wanted Addie. He felt a great surge of tenderness as he thought of her, and what she had gone through because of him—she couldn’t be expected to be herself all in a minute—it didn’t matter how she scolded him—it showed she felt he *belonged* to her—and here on the range in the night, nothing belonged to anything—nothing cared for you enough even to scold—it just closed in and closed in over you. . . . He jammed his hands into his pockets and strode for the house almost on the run. The threatening silence of the night seemed like a live thing trailing in his wake.

But the house was hushed and darkened when he got there, and the nurse, coming to Addie’s door for a moment, signalled him to be quiet, for she slept, and went back, leaving him if anything more lonesome than he had been before. Not a living soul to speak to!—even the cook had gone to bed. And to-morrow—he would only be underfoot again and get scolded. So that’s how it was “the night after!”—not a soul to say a word to!—house like a grave! He felt he would burst

if he couldn't have folks about him to talk to; he wanted his womenfolks first, but he felt terribly lonesome for "the fellas." Oh, for the good old crowd he used to run with, always laughing and cracking jokes; oh, for rough human voices and the glad "Hello, Bo!" and the loud "Hurrah! Bully fer you!" when he told his news—the news that set him apart and above the old crowd, even while it drew him to return to it. And he ended by telling himself that if he had to spend another day around the house, he should die.

At daybreak he saddled up and rode off to Rock River where he blurted out his glad tidings to half a dozen old-time pals, gulping raw whiskey to celebrate the event.

Again night lay over the ranges, a tangible loneliness matching the loneliness Dora felt within her own soul. She had lighted her lamp and built a fire in the hope of shutting her feelings out; but the fire grew tame and the coals cuddled down and went to sleep in their ash quilts and still she sat on without moving. All day she had struggled with the depression growing out of the unanswered call of those new feelings aroused in her by Eric's fatherhood—a famished longing for a man's child at her bosom, a bitter envy of Addie's beatitude—the woman she despised most in the world, and along with that had come a renewal of her problems of guardianship, and of what it was right for her to do, to withhold from Eric now that he was a man and had taken a man's place in the world. She had fulfilled the letter of her father's will, yes; but it was the spirit she strove to know—the spirit he had been trying to communicate in that last appeal to her as he was about to face the Great Unknown. Had he even dimly foreseen what had happened?—a new Eric, risen from the ashes

of his past and his sins, a father with a father's part to play. She wondered how her father could have; then how could he have thought to provide for the contingency? And here it was, and common justice said Eric must now have a man's opportunity, a man's control of property one day to be his, a man's right to share her responsibilities—and a brother's. Why, she needed him to help share things—her father had certainly never foreseen that! And he had left her. . . . "I leave you—*free!*" The completion of the sentence shot through her mind as if it had been spoken. That was the word he had been about to write when they called him—he had been starting to tell her that he left her free to decide as events showed the way; free to go by the spirit of a father's love rather than the letter of his misgivings. "Father, you would want him to have his share if you knew him now—if you could have seen him yesterday when he told us, 'This is the greatest day of my life,' you would want him to step into the place you prepared for him. And he ought to be taking up his end of the load now, while he's full of enthusiasm and push and go—full of new ideals; this is the time of all others to get him interested in your ideals—your plan for a family community—now that he's got a family of his own to work for. If I wait five years as the will directs and then divide as I'm allowed to, he'll be more settled down, of course, but he'll have cooled off, too—he won't be so ready to take hold of a new thing. But if I give him the money that's in the bank and let him build now over here—say down in the big meadow across the river—that'll bring him and the baby home where mother can see them every day—we'll help to counteract Addie's influence, and it'll be a start at the same time. Besides, if I don't do it now, it makes it look more than ever that I'm trying 'to hog everything for myself,' as Addie said—my not doing it when the

estate has an heir of the name to carry on the line will be all the proof she needs of any slander she chooses to circulate about my heartless stinginess. I'm sure, father, if you could see things as they are to-day, and the way they're working out for all us here——"

She heard a tap at the window, looked up and saw, as she thought, her father's face. Her heart jumped and stood still. The vision lasted only for an instant, but she had time before she heard the tap repeated on the door to ask herself why she should fear her father. Even then she paused to wonder why, if he were a spirit come to comfort and advise, he should knock instead of just *be there* in the room without announcement. Hearing her name, she was frightened, and went to the door.

"Who is it?" she called through before unlocking it.

For answer, the knob was turned and shaken, which frightened her still more. Was this a living man, and who?—and come for—what at this time of night? She looked about for something to defend herself with in case the door should be broken in; then mustered courage to call through: "Who is it and what's wanted?"

"It's *me!*" in a sharp whisper.

"Olaf? Is that you, Olaf?"

"It's me—Eric. Fer God's sake, open quick."

She let him in.

"What—" she began, and stopped. For a moment she felt she didn't know him—she was seeing a ghost after all. Ghastly white, dishevelled—a changed man stood before her; a mere husk of the man of yesterday. He put his back against the door, steadying himself by holding the jambs. So they faced each other, questioning; staring into each other's eyes as if trying to read and test each other's souls before words were uttered that must change everything between them forever.

He broke the silence—"I've killed Posey Burnham."

CHAPTER XXIII

IN the first seconds of their facing each other after his words were out, Dora's only feeling was that they had met, that the chasm between them had closed at last. She knew without his telling her that he had come to her first out of all the world—she, not Addie or his mother, was the one he had reached for in his despair; but she was so numb during those seconds, so unable to think what to say, that he wondered if he had spoken aloud, or only thought he had, and repeated: "I've killed Posey Burnham—he's layin' out there on the plains." He paused to wet his dry lips, but now the ice was broken, he hastened on with his explanation to get it over with. "I killed him comin' home from Rock River—I went down there this morning to tell the fel-las. A crowd of us got drinkin'—Posey, he'd jes' come in from Salt Lake with a bunch o' money—says he's been shippin' Mormon horses to New York—so we's all havin' a pretty good time, celebratin' fer both he an' I. And along 'bout the middle of the afternoon I says I gotta go, an' they all sorta-kinda started in joshin' me on bein' a fam'ly man an' I can't run with the bunch no more, an' I says that don't cut no ice with me now, whatche say—I gotta go, an' I'm goin'; an' Posey he says he's glad I am, fer he's gotta come up to Alec Moore's horse-camp an' it'll be company fer him an' I to come together, and he was awful anxious to see the baby—wisht he had a nice wife an' boy to be goin' home to, 'stead of a tent an' a bunch o' toughs. So him an' I come away. We kep' on talkin' an' kinda joshin',

first one thing, then another, an' I got joshin' him 'bout why he didn't git married, an' I says a man never knows what's in him till he sees the little chap that's named fer him; an' with that he turns on me an' says I may think I got it all over him, but how do I know it's mine, any-ways?

"Well, I didn't take it in what he was drivin' at—I handed it back to him he was envious because it wasn't his'n. An' with that he asks how do I know it ain't his'n? If it's got a pink strawberry mark on its right shoulder, then it is—it's what he's comin' up to the ranch to see; fer if it has, he'll claim it, an' where'll little Eric be then?

"I says: 'Lookka here, Posey, thez some things a man don't joke about, even in liquor—not to me, he don't. D'y' git me?'

"He says: 'Right you are!—an' I ain't jokin'. . . . That was the first hint I got. . . . I stopped muh horse. So did he. . . . I don't know what it was. . . . Ever sence I was a little shaver Posey's been gittin' me inta trouble—used to git me inta trouble with papa, then go off an' leave me take the punishment fer both. . . . It all come over me—mebbe it was jes' the liquor goin' outa me, I dunno—but it come over me this way: *I'm through with you*, Posey, through with all yer trickery an' bullyraggin'—I ain't goin' to have no more of you ner yer breed about me from this time on, ner have yer influence in *my* home on *my* son, whatever anybody else may be willin' fer put up with in their home. An' we two bein' there alone with nobody to hear—I didn't wanta shame him with the other fellas—thinks I, now's as good a time as any to take muh stand; so I said what it had come over me *to* say.

"You never heard what the fellas calls his 'devil laugh!' . . . Then he says: 'What'll y' bet on it? Of

course, I don't absolutely *know*,' he says, 'that's fer Addie to say; but goin' by the date, it *could be* mine as well as yours—'

"I shot him then." He swallowed hard, like a dry sob, and added: "The one shot done it. . . . I left him layin' where he fell off'n his horse an' come to tell you first. I wanted y' to understand how I come to do it; an' I wanted to tell y' how awful sorry I been 'bout that time an' papa's letter—if y' can fergive me. . . . I'll swing fer this—thez no excuse I can give that won't throw mud on Addie an' the boy. The sheriff may be after me now fer all I know—he'll git me in a couple o' days at most."

"Oh, Eric!"

With that cry, something broke loose in her, turned liquid and free, flowing out to him. She flung her arms about him, repeating his name: "Eric—Eric—Eric!" passionately, and felt his arms drawing her close to his body. "No—no—no! They can't—they shan't take you! Oh, you poor, poor boy! What you've gone through—you *poor child!*"

She buried her face against him. He was so much taller that her head nestled at his neck. She sobbed—hard, racking sobs without tears. Everything in her seemed to be surging up at once—horror at the thought of his swinging on the gallows—pity for his suffering, written in every line of him—justification for his act—and something else she couldn't have named that seemed to come direct to and through her from his encircling arms; for no man had ever held her to him before. And this man, doomed to death for doing what she knew she would have done in his place, was her brother, her sacred legacy from her dead father to guide and shield!

And in that moment of agony, as he stood before her

a murderer, she loved Eric as she had never loved any human being; loved him with all the purity, the fire, the fidelity of her being. Until that moment she had never known what love meant.

Out of the ruck of her feelings two thoughts presently emerged—he was hers, her very own, given to her by right of blood and birth, given to her by himself, by right of soul; and he must be saved, no matter how. With that her calm returned, her wits worked and planned, questioned, suggested, and hope a little revived in him. Up to the moment when she told him: “I’ll save you, or die!” he had doggedly accepted the gallows as his inevitable fate; but if she saw a way of escape, he would take it for her sake and the boy’s—for all their sakes. He trusted her utterly. He would do whatever she said, but he couldn’t think out anything—thinking seemed to have stopped while he had waited through the ghastly hours watching the lights in the house until he saw them all go dark but hers;—terrible hours of black despair that stabbed her heart as she pictured him out there alone on the range while she sat snug, nursing her little troubles by the fire.

“But thez precious little time to plan in now—he’ll be found most likely to-morrer—he’s layin’ right by the road,” he told her wearily, his hope fading at the thought of the imminence of his peril.

“He mustn’t *be* found, that’s all!” she asserted defiantly. “We must hide the body to-night!”

“Dora!”

“We can—the two of us.”

He looked at her doubtfully. “Wouldn’t it be better—to try something else?”

“What else?” She knew she had suggested the one real chance of saving everybody concerned. “There’s nothing else for it!”

"Perhaps—we better—leave him be found," he hazarded. Again, as on the night he stole the letter, there stirred in him that inarticulate desire, inherited from his Roman Catholic ancestry, for penance and shriving—the inward squaring of himself with his conscience through outward authority. If she would stand by him while he gave himself up—told a story that would account for his act and leave Addie out—even if they couldn't keep Addie out, everybody in Wyoming recognized it as a manhood right to defend a wife's name—if Dora would stand by him. . . . The sense of her moral weight—the atmosphere of effectiveness that a nature of coherent purposes and set ideals always sheds upon the emotional and irregular—became pregnant with hope for forgiveness. Get that, and he could take up his life where he had left off; but not with the burden of concealment. . . . The hope faded. There passed before his mind's eye the picture of Posey throwing up his hand, then crumpling and sliding to the ground. A corpse and a faithful cow-pony standing guard—a long dusty road—galloping horsemen; they halt—"What's this?"—"Posey Burnham—*murdered!*"—"Who done it?"—"Him an' Eric Feruseth was crossin' the plains together—I see 'em start; where's Eric?" The horses turn back to Rock River, galloping for the sheriff. . . . No hope. . . . Not a chance in a million. . . .

She echoed his words: "'Better let him be found!' What for—if we don't have to? We can't—there's too much risk; if he's found, it will be *found out* in no time who shot him. We must hide the body so it can't be found, no matter how they look for it. And who's to look, anyway? Who's to care—who's even to think what's become of him? You weren't seen quarrelling with him, were you? You weren't heard to threaten

him—or anything that might be twisted later against you?”

“No, of course not. We was joshin’ each other like we always done when we’s together, the bunch of us fellas; but him an’ me has always been *friends* . . . till that last five minutes.”

“Then you’re safe!” she cried. “He’s gone north buying horses—he doesn’t come back—that’s all there is to it! Nobody’ll suspect anything—there’s nothing to suspect; he goes off like that by himself whenever he feels like it and stays for months. Why, he even says when he bids people good-by: ‘This may be the last—I may never come back to these diggin’s again’—he did to mother, for I heard him. So they expect him to disappear, and in a year he’ll be forgotten. . . . But come—we must hurry.”

Had she known it, she was acting now precisely as her mother would have acted in her place: as a woman. It wouldn’t have occurred to either that she was making herself an accomplice in the concealment of a crime, and wouldn’t have mattered a whit if it had—they would have felt perfectly justified because blood is thicker than water, and abstract justice no excuse for the gallows, and Dora knew she was doing the only human thing that could be done—under the circumstances. She only wondered at his hesitation, his lack of the instant response she had expected after she had shown him “how easy it was.” But he seemed numb all over, and stood rooted to the spot, shaking his head as he muttered: “It’s all up any way y’ put it, as I see it. It’s bound to be found out some day—I dunno how, but it will be—murder will out—an’ then they’ll git me; an’ when they do, it’ll be a lot worse fer me than if I’d give muhself up in the first place an’ told all—an’ trusted to the jury.”

"It's not all up—it mustn't be!" she urged, only spurred to action by his weakness, which she accounted for by the shock he had had. "There's somewhere we can hide the body—or bury it—so it won't be found for years and years—not while we live—maybe never. And your being found out and punished won't bring *him* to life again—your telling won't. . . . And think of mother—think of Polly—if you won't think of yourself. Think of your boy—of—of Addie! Why should they all suffer for this? Save yourself for them—and save them what it will mean to have you tried for murder, whether you're acquitted or not. Why, you've got to think of them, Eric—no matter what it costs us now, we've got to hide the body."

He felt himself caught up and swept along with her passionate eloquence, her plea for his mother. "There's a chance," he admitted. "I'll take it—if you say—if you'll help. I couldn't do it alone. If we was to bury him half a mile back from the road in the sage-brush—bury him deep enough so's the coyotes couldn't dig him out—why, it ain't likely he'll be found. . . . If we could do it—" He looked at her doubtfully.

"Come—we must hurry—it's getting late," was her reply.

He went out to saddle a horse for her and find a shovel while she changed to her riding-skirt, noticing before she blew out the lamp that her little clock said it was a few minutes before eleven. As she stole on tiptoe through the silent kitchen she took the lantern and a box of matches. Her only words to him were: "I'm ready."

The night was chilly, though the day had been warm, and while both shivered frequently they chose to attribute it to the wind. They rode in silence, walking their horses until out of ear-shot of the house, then spur-

ring to a lope that rapidly covered the long miles—too rapidly for him, not rapidly enough for her—and the hoofs of one horse beat out the words, "Hurry-up—hurry-up—hurry-up!" and the other, "Save-them-all—save-them-all—save-them-all!" Beyond that, she didn't even try to think. The neigh of a horse brought her brother to a sharp halt; she stopped a length ahead. For some seconds, all they could see was a pair of black ears silhouetted against the star-powdered sky.

"That's his cow-pony standin' guard, I guess," whispered Eric, straining his eyes to see if there were men near.

Then for the first time her heart began thumping.

"Wait till I see if it's all right," he whispered, laying his hand on her arm as he leaned close to her. His touch sent a thrill through both of them—it was like saying: "The fatal moment has come, and it's do or die now." She laid her hand on his and pressed it to reassure him. "I can see the saddle, but if it ain't his pony—" With that he slipped off and went cautiously ahead, a few steps at a time, watching and listening.

As his outline faded, a sudden anxiety swept over her. Suppose the body had already been discovered and taken away? Suppose it had been discovered and some one was guarding it? How could she explain why she and Eric were riding out there alone at midnight? She had not given that a thought—explanation if they met any one; nor had she formed more than the vaguest mental picture of what she had come forth to see—a man lying dead by the roadside. The time seemed endless till she heard Eric whistle and saw him coming to her.

"Yes, it's Posey's pony, all right, but he's strayed—I ain't found the body, but it's somewheres here if his horse is."

He reached for the lantern and she got off and stood shivering, but trying to hide it while he struck a light. She was afraid now even to look about her—she had never seen a dead body, and one was there, close, rigid, accusing, in its appalling silence. Side by side, she and her brother moved stealthily along the edge of the road, Eric swinging the lantern back and forth, scanning the patches of illumination for the precise spot, and then—she saw.

For a moment, the horror of it took her breath and she clutched at him, swaying. She couldn't—they couldn't—touch that thing, stark in its icy denunciations: to touch it was to take those denunciations literally upon their living flesh.

He caught her arm and steadied her, then lifting the lantern, he looked her in the eyes. Without her uttering a word, he knew what was passing in her mind—that the corpse cried aloud to heaven.

"Don't faint," he begged, and as he saw she was struggling against just that, he burst out: "I'll give it up—it's too much fer y' to try—too sickenin'. We can't never put it through what we got ahead of us. It ain't right y' should touch him—I can't let y' do it fer me, Dora—I ain't wuth it."

Her love and her courage surged back, and with it a new respect for him as he stood there thinking only of her, willing to sacrifice his last chance to save her feelings.

"I'm all right!" she cried, and felt so then. "Don't mind me—I'm not going to faint—I was only—startled. It's the first . . . I've ever seen, and it made me rather . . . it's all over now—it only lasted a minute. What's to be done?"

"We gotta carry him off first, fur's we can from the road."

"Oh, yes. . . . Couldn't we lift him on his horse instead of carrying him?"

"I don't think it." He felt himself go weak all over. The mere thought of clasping the body to put it on the horse nauseated him—if his life depended on it, he couldn't do that.

She instantly seemed to know, and replied briskly: "No—he's much too heavy to lift up. We'll have to carry him between us."

Then Eric turned the body on its back and she saw the face—blood-streaked, staring, the mouth open in a kind of surprise, as though Posey hadn't expected so soon to be thrust into eternity, had a glimpse of it before life fled, and found it so different from what he had been taught—a look that penetrated both of them and brought from Eric the remorseful comment: "Seems like I'd ought of give him a minute fer to git ready so's he'd know what he's goin' to meet."

"If you had, he would have killed you," she retorted, steeling herself against reproaches. With the singleness of purpose of her stock, she was rapidly throwing aside all considerations and sentiments but the task ahead of her—that, and that only was to be thought about until it was accomplished; sentiments and self-reproaches could wait. But seeing Eric wavering, held back both by repulsion and attraction, fascinated into inactivity by new ideas of the other side of death—secrets betrayed by Posey's strange look—she admonished him in a tone of command: "Come. We mustn't waste time."

"Time" was a little unfortunate, for he took it up with a sigh. "I didn't give *him* no time, an' a man had ought to have at least a couple of minutes fer to—think." He was going to say "pray" but changed it—Posey had never prayed in his life. It had been his open boast

that he believed in God not at all, and man only as far as he could watch him. Dora's return charge was a bit sharp: "He had all the time he deserved—giving him more now won't help anything. We're the ones who've got to consider time—it's everything to us and nothing to him. . . . Here—I'll fix the lantern—" She took it from him and tied it to her saddle-horn, standing her horse so the light fell on the body. "You take the shoulders—you're stronger than I am."

They staggered into the sage-brush with their load, painfully working their way step by step, the three horses slowly following, snuffing the air, sniffing inarticulate questions at each other, the lantern-light answering with uncanny shadows that popped up continually in their path and slunk away in the bush; staggered for what seemed miles, but was only a few hundred yards, before, panting and trembling, they were forced to set the body down and rest. It was when they raised it to go on that a letter fell from the dead man's pocket. Eric picked it up. Turning it to the light, he exclaimed, "Addie!" and without an instant's hesitation tore it from the envelope.

It was dated "December"; it began, "Dear Posey"—there was no doubt as to that; for the rest, it was almost word for word a copy of the letter she had sent Eric at Christmas, demanding that he marry her, for her coming child was his. She had played both men on the chance of getting one; she had risked the revelation of her treachery by assuming the other's silence to shield himself; and she had missed one man—half a dozen forwarding addresses on the envelope in Utah and Montana showed that Posey might have just received it; might have returned manfully to claim his child;—to find it claimed by the man that as child, lad, youth he had scorned for a weakling and used for a scapegoat!

What a revenge for fate to take!—his own son a whip in the hand of the weakling scapegoat!

In one flash Eric saw it all, but he only repeated, "Addie!" when he looked up, putting his hand over his heart and thrusting the letter at Dora. He stood thus, motionless while she read it, for as he had uttered the word, he felt something in him suddenly go out—it was as if old age had struck him, mind, body, and soul; and when she had finished the letter and put it in her pocket without a word, he hurriedly stooped and took up his end of the load, inwardly blessing her for her silence, her understanding.

It was when she straightened up to lift her end that the revelation burst upon her: "*I* condemned him to this marriage! *I* let my brother be ruined to make one bastard less in the world, and now another man's bastard bears my father's name! That's what comes of my Puritanical *morality*—murder! Mother was right—she knew Addie—she never believed it was Eric's child—she tried to save him—I wouldn't let her. *I* made him marry the creature—I am responsible—I am the real murderer!" Straining and staggering along through the sage-brush, panting, almost suffocating, the blood roaring in her ears, the deeper meanings, the wider significances of the whole situation surged up from her inner consciousness like gushes of pure truth. She saw that her mother's instinct had been nearer the mark, had apprehended the greater law that says: "Abandon the woman who abandons herself." Addie had abandoned herself to her sensuality, her hereditary trickery and greed—she was what her forebears had made her. Marriage couldn't unmake her: there's no compounding a felony with nature—the law of heredity mercilessly punishes and exacts, even unto the third and fourth generation of them that violate it in mixed marriages. It had

exacted its toll in Addie—it had with equal inexorable-ness exacted it in Dora and in Eric; and in her striving to fulfil a moral ideal that nature was blind to, Dora the Puritan had rewarded Addie the wolf, and had made—Eric the murderer! And her mother—her careless, irresponsible, indulgent, unintellectual mother, whose ideal was only happiness and love—*she* had seen the truth! What illimitable irony! Ideals converted into ordeals! Moral righteousness defeating its own aims, destroying itself by its own activity, its sword thrust through its own heart by nature herself! “And it is I who made him marry that creature—I—I—I!” the words kept beating through her as an undercurrent. “Against his own wishes—against mother’s pleading—mother’s wisdom—against mere common sense! I didn’t even stop long enough to see the woman first—find out what she actually was! I *ordered* him to marry her . . . and I called it *moral righteousness*. Here’s the fruit of *that* sort of moral righteousness! Oh, my poor, poor brother!”

Under the obsession of these ideas, she had lost the sense of time and space, hardly knew what she was doing, and was like one awakened from a trance when Eric, suddenly dropping his end of the burden with a groan, nearly threw her off her feet.

“Oh! What—where am I?” she exclaimed.

“We’re over the other side the ridge now,” he answered. “It’s fur as I can go—I’m all in. But it’s fur enough from the road I guess—an’ we won’t find no easier diggin’ no matter how fur we go, so we might as well put him here an’ be done with it.”

He untied the shovel from his saddle and began to dig, pausing first to instruct her: “Y’ might be gittin’ stones together fer to pile on top so’s the coyotes won’t dig him out after.”

She collected stones, feeling for them with her foot in the dark, carrying them gingerly so as not to leave tell-tale stains on her clothing. He dug, slowly, painfully, trying not to let a sigh escape while she was near. More than an hour went by. Then he stood up, steadying himself with the shovel, and told her: "We better finish. I'm 'fraid I'll give out if I keep on. I don't want no trouble gittin' home—we got that still to do."

"I'll dig!"

"No. It's shaller, but it'll do. You git the saddle an' bridle offen Posey's horse—we gotta hide them, too."

"But what about the horse? If he's found——"

Eric sighed. "He's part o' the risk we're takin'."

"Oh, well—there's nothing to show he didn't just wander off—slip his picket-rope, or something," she returned cheerfully. "No use worrying about him—we'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

They laid the body with the head resting on the saddle, and Eric began filling in earth at the feet, but he stopped when he reached the dead man's chest.

"I hate fer to throw it onto his face," he uttered thickly, wiping the clammy sweat on his forehead. "Poor old Posey—y' had yer revenge after all! Addie's the one I'd ought of killed—she cheated the both of us—she done the both of us outa the boy. I don't blame y' none fer bein' sore on me—I'd of been sore, too. But I wisht I could bury y' decent—y' didn't mean no more harm with Addie them days than what I did."

Strange life, that we live side by side with our nearest and dearest, and in opposite directions of the spirit! The same event had bloomed, for Eric with man's charity for man, for Dora, with a conviction of the illimitable wrongness of things as they are in a social and moral world where Addies and Poseys are possible, and created

only to prey on nobler flesh and blood. Sentiment had petrified in her breast; horror had faded out; in their place had come exultation that justice had been done: the world was rid of one beast of prey. She felt no reverence for the corpse and, taking the shovel, fiercely completed the grave, and felt a thrill of satisfaction as the earth blotted out the staring face: blotting out the wretched creature was her vindication of Eric. She felt alive all over. It was the primitive savage at the bottom of the souls of all vital women coming to the surface to avenge a member of the clan, to wreak revenge on his enemy. By that time she saw Posey only as "an enemy."

Eric watched her with astonishment and actual shrinking from her. He wondered "how she could." He couldn't—even with his life depending on it, he told himself, he couldn't have done that. Somewhere in a dim undercurrent of his mind he felt relieved that she could, and did; he admired her courage in doing it, and gratefully appreciated that she was doing it for his sake;—all that came up later and swept away his shrinking; but for the moment his mind was too absorbed in Posey's side of the story, Posey's excuse and vindication. "Poor old Posey—I guess I'd of felt same as you done if it had been me in your place, an' you braggin' to me like I bragged . . . never suspectin' the truth," Eric had kept thinking all the time he was working at the grave: "An' y' understand now, don't y'? Y' *see now*, don't y', that I didn't know what Addie was?—that I didn't suspect y' had any cause to say what y' said? I thought it was only meanness. It ain't the first time y' was mean to me, Posey, an' I meant y' should learn to draw the line somewheres. But I draw the line somewheres, too. This don't look it, but if I'd of known. . . ." Thus had he come to charity, and through

charity to a sympathy that made him feel himself lying there in the grave, the cold earth, the harsh stones falling on his naked flesh, into his eyes, his mouth; suffocating him; mercilessly embracing, ruthlessly pressing down, heavier and heavier; pinning him there and blotting him out. That's what it was to be dead and buried! He knew then, as the last outlines disappeared, that part of himself, of his life, of his very soul lay there dead and buried, taken from the world of men, forever and ever. . . . He was brought out of his horrors by Dora's briskly ordering him: "Just hold up the lantern so I can clean up the leavings, will you? There's no use in making this any more conspicuous than necessary."

She spoke with more cheerful indifference than she felt, however; for with the blotting out of the dead, her vengeance was over, and her thoughts rushed back to the living; to the double problem of shielding Eric and dealing with Addie. After the first shock had worn off, then what? She was too tired to think; too emotionally exhausted; she felt she could lie down right there on the ground and sleep. It was why she whipped herself into a briskly cheerful tone: that night's job had to be *finished*.

As the last stones were piled above the grave, brother and sister confronted each other with sad yet questioning eyes—death lay at their feet, life before them, dark as the surrounding night. Silently she lifted her lips to his. It was her first kiss to any man, and to her it was a vow between them, at once a renunciation of her future and an acceptance of his, whatever it might be; she was offering herself in expiation of the wrong she had done him in forcing his marriage; she was constituting herself his shield and comforter—whatever his cup of bitterness, whatever his thorny path,

she would share them as her allotted portion, uncomplaining, to the end of the world.

They reached home at dawn, a pearly sky above them until the sun peeped over the plains. At the first twinkle of its gold at the horizon, Eric reined in and watched it rise.

"It comes up—just the same," he said.

CHAPTER XXIV

To women of Dora's moral build, unchastity always seems voluntary—love and the security of marriage must come before she can yield herself at all: illicit pleasure is not so much repugnant to her as non-existent. It is for this reason that such women always hold the man the seducer; and, boy-like, Eric had agreed with his sister when she called his act "seduction," not knowing that in her vocabulary the word meant that he had urged, incited, and betrayed a pure girl under promise of marriage. In his vocabulary it merely admitted illegal paternity. But if he had often regretted his hasty marriage as he came to know Addie better and see through her whims and meannesses, her endless petty trickery and schemes, something else growing up within him tended to make light of her imperfections. She was his woman—his very own—his own by law—and it gave him a comfortable, settled feeling grateful to his soul such as he had never had before with any human being, not even with his mother, all love and concessions, whose stand to-day anybody could wheedle her out of to-morrow. Addie couldn't be wheedled, at least not now when she had her man tied to her hard and fast; nor did she wheedle: by the same token, she felt it beneath her and gave Eric orders in her high-pitched voice, which he obeyed with a more amiable docility than his family would have believed him capable of. She was his woman and her child his child—that said it all up to the fatal hour when he read her letter to Posey Burnham. Then in a flash he was awake

to her worst, and in that flash she died to him. He couldn't expose her now, if only for Dora's sake; for his own, nothing mattered any more.

And "for Eric's sake" was now Dora's guiding star. The night had irrevocably consecrated her to him. Here at last was a definite, tangible work for her to do without question of right or wrong: Eric needed her, that was all, and she responded with the best in her; but, oh, what a network of lies, subterfuges, and evasions—to be made as well as to be met—now surrounded her!

How deep his need and how dire the family complications she began to realize within the first hour at home. She had sent him to bed in her study, locking the door and taking the key as a precaution for momentary concealment, though she saw that concealment of his being there wasn't possible for any length of time, and that they must think out some plausible story to account for his presence and his condition; a story neatly fitted in all its minor details that didn't come to her while she changed her riding-clothes for a morning dress and hurried softly to the kitchen to light a fire and make coffee; and then, as luck would have it, just as she was feeling she had escaped seeing anybody for another hour, feeling a little at ease with her situation, she knocked the lid-lifter off the range onto the brick hearth. Her mother and Polly, dozing on the other side of the thin partition, awoke at the clatter, tumbled out of bed, and came shuffling into the kitchen a few minutes later, half-dressed, yawning, and a little conscience-smitten at what they supposed was their tardiness.

"Why, Dody!" cried Polly, looking at the kitchen clock, which said half-past five, and assuring herself it was going before committing herself to more. "Yep—that's right! Ha-pas' five! Why, *Do-dy*! What *did y'* git up so early fer—an' wake us up, too? I might

of laid abed another whole hour—" she yawned and stretched with a loud "A-h-h-h!" and finished: "I call it mean."

"I'm awfully sorry I disturbed you—it was an accident."

"But whadda y' makin' coffee fer—whadda y' up fer at this time o'—*night*?" Polly scolded petulantly. "Y' never do git up when we git up anyways; then go git up at night——"

Dora seized the lead on the inspiration of the moment and returned as offhandedly as she could: "I'm making coffee for Eric. He's here—and sick."

She thought it better to get that part out at once—it would prepare the way for more when she and he had thought it out, and at the same time be a reason why the rest of the family couldn't see him. Their response was almost violent—"Eric here? Eric sick? How did he get here?" and then her mother demanded with her old-time jealousy, "When did he come, I'd like to know? And why wasn't *I* called to him if he's sick?" adding as Dora didn't immediately answer, "Where is he now, my poor, sick boy?—where is he, I say?" in a tone more aggressively aggrieved than solicitous.

Had Dora guessed it, Eric's being there sick meant still more of her mother's dream fulfilled—she had always known that when it came to sickness, Addie could never take *her* place—no new wife ever did take a mother's place, and here was Dora with her managing hand stepping in between, as if she didn't do enough stepping in between her and Polly to satisfy anybody! Her mother was about to give voice to these sentiments when Dora explained: "You were asleep, mother—it's why I didn't call you. He came in last night a little before eleven."

When she said it, "eleven" seemed an inspiration

rather than a glib lie. True, he had come in the first time a little before eleven, and then they'd gone out on their grim errand. The thought of that choked her into a moment of hating her mother with her everlasting probing, which she was going on with mercilessly, "But what ails him? He was all right day before yesterday when he come home to tell us—I never saw him lookin' better in his life. Sick? Is he sick, or met with an accident? Why don't you tell me? What are you concealing from me?"

Dora was saved from immediate answer by Polly's contributing flippantly with the uncanny way she had of knowing what others wanted to keep from her: "I bet he's been on a drunk with the fellas—down to Rock River, er somewheres—an' he's come here to sober up, 'stead o' goin' home an' gittin' a tongue-lashin' from Addie. *She* won't stand fer no more drunks—she told me she wouldn't when we was there. All I hope is you'll make him behave an' not leave him have more dope to sober up on like mamma did last time." With which she untied a battered hair-ribbon she had slept in, and began to comb her hair with her fingers preparatory to doing it up for the day.

Her mother, feeling the slur on both her son and herself, turned to admonish her, "How can you talk so about Eric?" before asking Dora in a tone colored with this new resentment: "Is that what you're concealin'?—that he's been on a drunk again . . . after him swearin' off all winter?"

Again on the inspiration of the moment, Dora took the offered lead and replied: "Yes, I'm afraid it's—that. He went down to Rock River yesterday to tell his friends about the baby, and they all got celebrating in a saloon——"

"And the whiskey they sell there is *poison*—worse than

poison to a man that hasn't had a drop for months!" her mother flung in. "I should think he might well be sick! It's a wonder he got home alive."

Seeing that the explanation had gone further than she had hoped, Dora was about to enlarge and embroider the theme enough to cover immediate contingencies and account for Eric's need of seclusion and repose, when her mother started out of the kitchen with the words: "I must see my boy."

"Mother!" The tone was peremptory as a military command. Mrs. Feruseth became instantly more suspicious than ever of something concealed, and stepped back, asking almost fiercely: "Has my son been hurt?" She stressed the words "my son" with some care. "Has he? Did he get into a drunken row? Was there any shooting down there? . . . *Was* there? Why don't you answer me? Has he been shot? Have they shot my son?"

Dora bit her lip in vexation and dismay—it would be so like Polly to chip in at this hint and ask if *he* had shot somebody and was hiding; but at that moment she had the end of her hair-ribbon in her mouth, and Dora managed to control her voice enough to declare firmly: "No, of course he isn't hurt! He's sick—the way he was last time, and he's too sick to be disturbed, and—you mustn't, that's all. I promised him he shouldn't see *anybody* till he was ready to, and I mean that he shall get the chance this time to sober up in private if he wants to, and for as long as he wants to keep out of sight."

"Oh, why don't y' say it out an' be done with it," gabbled Polly, with her usual pertness, finishing her bow and throwing it back with an impudent toss of her little head. "He's come home drunk as a loon an' dirty as a pig an' all nasty-smelly, an' yer ashamed of him. So'm

I—after him swearin' off. I don't wanta see him when he's thataway—y' can betcher life I don't—so y' don't hafta keep *me* out: y' can't git me *in*. An' if you wanta make coffee fer him an' pour it down him till he sobers up, why y' can; I won't prevent you—I don't want yer job. But seems to me y' got awful fond of Eric all to oncet—y' didn't even *speak* to him when he come over to tell y' how he's gotta new baby. Awful fond—awful sudden." With which parting shot, she flitted back to her room to rummage for the dress she meant to put on, and not finding it instantly, because it was so deeply buried in bedclothes, she let forth a shrill, peremptory: "Mamma! Maa-maa! I want you!" that took her mother hastening to the rescue, and being there, she decided, since her son was in the house, to put on her good clothes herself as a tribute to him.

Dora snatched up the coffee-pot and a cup, and was just starting off with them when Olaf lumbered into the room and greeted her: "I see Eric's horse up to the corral jus' now."

He dropped this without a good morning, or waiting for hers, and with it, gave her a look that said: "I wonder what's up now?" followed by another that as plainly said: "Y' might's well tell me—I'm same as one o' the fam'ly—yer best friend and protector since that other night. If he's been drinkin' again——"

He brought those words out: "If he's been drinkin'—" as a feeler, and paused expectant. She thought he leered at her.

A wave of anger, disgust, humiliation swept over her, followed by a wave of fear that made her tremble. What had Eric done with the shovel? She had hung the lantern back on its peg—she glanced at it to make sure—but suppose Olaf were about to spring another discovery on her? She thought she heard the words trembling on

his tongue: "Somebody's been usin' the shovel since yestiddy—it was took from where I left it—" and choked back her feelings with effort. She must appear open and aboveboard, whatever she did, even to her hired man—more so, perhaps, to him than to anybody else. So she admitted, trying to appear both casual and friendly at the same time: "Eric has been drinking, I'm sorry to say, and he's come here to sober up—fortunately. He had sense enough not to go home just now. Of course, I'm awfully sorry about it, awfully; I thought he'd sworn off for good."

"They don't—fer good; not in this country," Olaf contributed, coming a step nearer her. "They all relapse."

"So it seems. But I'd take it as a personal favor, Olaf—a really great favor—if you'll see that this relapse doesn't get about among the neighbors more than it has to. We ought to be able to keep it to ourselves; he'll be himself in a few days, and if you don't say anything—Neil doesn't know, I think?—well, if you'll just quietly turn his horse out in the pasture——"

"Trust me, Miss Feruseth!" he grinned with pride, for he took her uncommon affability as a tribute of friendship and a recognition of his discreet ways. But friendship required more words and a softer smile, and he offered them, coming another step nearer: "Y' don't need fer to feel too cut up over it, Miss Feruseth—I don't guess it means he's started boozin' fer steady after him bein' on the water-wagon so long. When he come over to tell us 'bout his new baby, I see he's all up in the air, an' I says to muhself then, I says: 'I bet you bust out 'fore yer through, young fella.' Men's that way when they git just about so high up in the air—nothin' won't do 'em but to fly higher on the wings o' rum—only it ain't rum they sell down there to Rock

River—it's tarantula soup, nothin' more ner less—stuff flavored with them big pizon spiders to make it bite an' feel like something when it gits in yer stummick."

It was the longest speech he had ever made her; and he loved her, and she hated him for it! She fled, hardly knowing how she got off, but mumbling something about playing nurse; and he clumped out to turn the horse into the pasture. The warmth of her smile spread in his heart until it took the chill off his pet dislike in that house—Eric. "Sorta pity he went an' done it now—but now's the time he *would* do it," thought Olaf with real kindness and understanding. "I betcher she's awful disappointed—she's awful cut up 'bout it an' tryin' not to show it. He's gittin' to be quite a chap—the old man's stuff's beginnin' to show out in him. If he hadn't throwed himself away on that Rohmer girl! She ain't *her* kind, now you betcher! Y'd think a fella had her fer a sister would do some pickin' an' choosin', git something he's proud fer to fetch home an' leave his fam'ly see. A girl's gotta be something more'n a bunch o' calicoes 'fore I'd look at her a second time, now you betcher! She's gotta be a *lady*!"

His thoughts, like the leaves of a palm-tree, sprouted and clustered at one spot, upheld by a single stem—Dora; and crude as they mostly were, they showed an inner man very different from the man he was a scant year previous when she came home from college—a change she had not even noticed, and all because she had unconsciously given him ideals to measure up to; and like a faithful shaggy dog he was trying to measure up and be worthy her trust in him. Her request set him up tremendously, but he never knew that his studied air of unconcern and constantly reiterated statement to the neighbors: "Eric, he got took down with some kinda *fever*—I don't guess it's ketchin', but he ain't

seein' nobody"—was one of the main safeguards of Dora's dreadful secret.

Eric lay on the divan with the Indian blanket drawn close about his face. In the half-hour since Dora had left him he seemed dreadfully changed—at first sight he might have been taken for a man of fifty. Indeed, at her first look she had thought him dead, for he didn't open his eyes till she spoke his name, and afterward he drank the coffee as if he didn't know what he was doing. Though she hated disturbing him, she felt she must tell him that his mother and Polly knew he was home. "I've only staved them off for an hour or two," she explained, "and we've got to be ready with a story—there'll be no escaping mother for long—she's bound to see you."

At that an exclamation broke from him: "My God! I can't—I can't! There's *no* satisfyin' her oncet she begins to pry. I can't go through with it."

"Yes, dear, you can. Play sick—talk sick; I'll tell her you're too sick to talk at all. So she'll be expecting that and won't be disappointed if you don't say anything. I can keep her away afterward, once she's satisfied herself I'm not deceiving her—concealing a broken arm, or something."

She tried to be cheerful about it, but he only groaned: "I'll try—fer your sake. But I'm all in, Dora—I feel like she'd tear the last rag outa me if she begins to cry the way she does, an' hug an' kiss. I can't stand it! Love like that's so awful when a person don't know what yer goin' through—what y' been through—don't understand how y' feel—how y' can't even think about lovin' anybody. . . . But it ain't that I don't love her—I do," he added hastily, a little ashamed of the way he had spoken of her. "Only—love ain't all there is in

the world—thez other things fer a man . . . an' fer me . . . that she ain't never understood."

She took his hand between hers, saying, "Yes, I know," and it seemed to strengthen him, for he told her: "Well, leave her come—I'll try to do what's right."

His mother came unusually subdued. She had been prepared to find him very sick, and one look at his pinched face proved it. She kissed him—she couldn't have done less and kept her respect for her motherhood—but she refrained from questioning, not even asking how he felt. Mother instinct showed her the truth, and though not able to put it in words, she was the first to perceive his spiritual remoteness, to catch, through some inner divination, the subtle atmosphere of the *lost touch* when the soul withdraws those secret tendrils by which it has clung to the world and life. What she noticed first, however, was his resemblance to his father—he might have been James Feruseth himself lying there with his austerity and quietude, his look of inward seeing and contemplation; and her heart cried out for her son, for his warmth of feeling, his impetuosity, for anything that was Eric and not James.

Eric had nerved himself to this interview as he had never done to anything in his life, for it meant literally life or death to him; and though he knew, as he told himself before she came, that he "was done for—it was only a matter of a few days more," there were still things on his mind to be settled before he was ready to pass out into the great unknown. He felt he must "get ready"—he couldn't face it without warning the way Posey had had to face it, and go. That to Eric now seemed the most distressful part of his deed—the one part that he could expiate a little by making himself suffer for both through anticipation. Then he would face death like a man. But if his mother should start crying over him.

. . . He lay stone-still when she entered, waiting for her to begin—whatever she was going to do; and she bent and kissed him—that was all. In reply to it, he brought out: "I guess—I'm pretty—sick—mom'," and closed his eyes.

"It's that poison whiskey they sell down there to Rock River," she assured him hastily. "Those saloons—they're the ruin of the whole community. They ought to be prosecuted for—murder."

He started at the last word; then a faintly perceptible smile played on his lips. How well she'd hit the mark! How easily she'd accepted Dora's explanation. All he said was: "I guess it's 'bout time they was," and became silent again.

She sat on the edge of the divan for another minute, examining him critically, then softly, sadly left the room.

Back in the kitchen, however, her self-control gave way, and between sobs she demanded, ordered, implored that Dora send instantly to Laramie for the doctor.

It had been Dora's own wish, but Eric had almost collapsed at the suggestion.

"Leave me die in peace an' be done with it all," he begged. "He can't do no good now, an' it only means me tellin' him . . . *what?* This pain—it come on in muh heart when I read the letter; I can't tell him *that!* But he'll keep askin' an' askin'—pryin' an' pryin'. . . . I gotta tell him somethin'—I can't jes' lay here—"

"Don't tell him anything, but that you were drinking," ventured Dora. It seemed easy enough to her—she had become very glib in explanations that didn't explain. It was the eternal instinct of the mother bird, decoying danger away from her nest and young; and once she had started, decoy explanations seemed to

spring spontaneously to fit the occasions. Being a man, he wasn't equal to her in that, even if he had been able to make the effort. He shook his head, and quenched further argument by telling her: "It wouldn't do no good havin' him, an' it would only cut short the little time I got left. They ain't anything now could hold me back—I *want to go*."

Her heart sank. She knew then—what she didn't dare let herself know, now that this wonderful thing had come to her, a soul to companion in its suffering, a being of her own flesh and blood to cherish from the inmost depths of her. She *wouldn't know* that she had him for only a brief moment more, when she had but just found him. She put the thought away from her as far as she could, called it "imagination," assured herself that he wasn't as sick as he seemed; that he had youth on his side and everything in his favor, but her words had small conviction even to herself when she protested: "You'll look at things differently when you've got your strength back."

He stroked her hand for a moment and then explained: "It ain't a matter of strength, er even of this miserable pain in muh heart that nags me every time I move—it's that there ain't anything more in the world I wanta do, er have. The mainspring's broke—the works has stopped—" He gave her a wan smile. "I can't seem to *tick* no more! I'm only layin' here a little while 'fore I git put away with all the rest o' the broken toys an' things; only waitin' round because o' one er two little matters still botherin' me, but I don't know hardly how to speak of 'em."

"Tell me, dear—you can tell me anything."

"Well, Addie's baby. We don't know whose it really is, an' I don't see as we ever can know. That letter to Posey didn't prove nothin', no more'n her letter to me.

She's the only one knows the truth, an' she won't tell. She's too smart fer that; an', anyways, y' couldn't expect it of any woman in her position—it wouldn't be human nature fer her to tell, now she's married an' got a name. Why should she—spoil everything fer herself? . . . An' it wouldn't be right, neither, fer her to make things worse fer the little kid by tellin'. *He* didn't do anything—*he's* innocent."

There was a note of passionate appeal and protest in that last, and he eagerly scanned her face for an answering look. These insights into abstract justice, a latent strain from his father, had come to Eric suddenly, released, perhaps, by that stopping of the ticking of life's smaller interests and aims. In the stillness spread over him, he seemed to catch the beat of greater issues and larger meanings; he wanted her to feel them with him. But Dora hadn't reached the place where she could think of the baby—she felt at the moment nothing but bitterness and indignation against Addie in particular and fate in general. Not even noticing the point of his main contention—the innocence of the child through all the right and wrong, the sensuality and Puritanism that had mixed about him and prepared the way for him to find his world a camp of conflicting interests and warring passions—she harked back to the injustice to the living, to the innocent dead—her father—to the treachery that had wrought it, asserting with vehemence: "I could make her confess! I've got her letter to Posey Burnham—she can't deny *that!*"

"What would be the good?" he questioned. "Who'd gain anything by it? Y'd have the satisfaction of lettin' her know y' knew, but then—she would ask, where did y' git the letter? an' then, where's Posey at? She would start huntin' fer him——"

"I don't think she would do that—not if she thought

he gave you the letter as a proof of her treachery, and left the country in disgust. No—she would never try to find him—she would do precisely the opposite! There would be nothing she would dread so much as having to meet him face to face and hear what he would say.”

She spoke with unbounded conviction on that point, and he gave it up with a mild “Well, perhaps . . . but then . . . even so, who would gain anything? Callin’ names ain’t no great satisfaction—that’s all it would amount to—not when y’ got so many other things on yer mind. An’ all y’d git fer it with her would be her callin’ names back——”

“An epithet-slinging match!” interjected Dora, with a whimsical smile, and she felt immediately willing to forego it, if that was what “proving it and making her confess” meant, for she proudly admitted that in the matter of epithets and vile language she was no match for Addie, and thanked her gods she wasn’t.

“It’s liable to be some worse than that. Addie, she ain’t altogether to be trusted . . . not to tell things . . . that ain’t so,” he confessed slowly. “She would git even by circulatin’ things . . . about you . . . about how you come to have that letter . . . that Posey give it to you, not to me, because he thought a lot of you, mebbe. . . . She would make it out that you an’ him had some sort of relations. . . .”

She felt the blood rushing into her cheeks. “Why, how could she say, or hint—” she protested. “I only saw him once in my life—months ago, when he came to say good-by to mother! What a lie! What a *liar!*”

His face hardened. She had said the word he had been trying since the day of his marriage not to say; but now that it was out, he felt at once relieved and

oppressed: another self-deception was thrown away, but another drop of bitterness was added to his cup.

"Yes," he agreed, "she is—a liar. Sometimes it seems like she don't even know she's tellin' 'em, they're so bound to git found out on her, y'd think a child would see fur enough ahead not to tell 'em. But slanderin' another woman—makin' her out no better than herself, specially when you done something to her she's bound to git even over . . . Lies! Thez folks in this world—mebbe you don't know because you ain't met 'em—but I tell y', Dora, thez folks out here—fellas and girls both—that would believe *any* slander about you, *knowin' it to be a lie*—believe it to make their own sins seem smaller—believe it so's to drag you down to their level—say you ain't no better than what they are themselves. I could name ten of 'em right off—her friends; an' they'd believe what she said sooner than what any one else said, knowin' I'm her husband an' your brother an' I mighta—told her things. Don't risk it, Dora—don't risk it fer the little satisfaction y'd git outa seein' her squirm! That's all y' could do to her, an' she knows it; the rest don't matter to the law, the baby was born in my house to my wife—it's got my name an' the law says it is mine, whether er no. . . . An' besides, seein' how I done fer Posey—seein' we don't really know, you an' me—Posey an' me together mighta got the truth out of her; but if it's mine, I'd ought to keep quiet, an' if it's his, me keepin' quiet now is the only thing I can do to make it up to him. He done me no wrong—no more'n I done him marryin' a woman he thought was his—it was Addie done us both all the wrong they was."

"Oh, Eric!" she cried. "It was *I* did all the wrong—I made you marry her! You would have waited—

mother urged you to—she saw clearer than I did what Addie was; then we should have found out.”

He seemed almost fatherly as he patted her hand. His vision had cleared to greater questions than on whose shoulders rested ancient blames; nor did it relieve him to have that blame rest on hers.

“You only done what was right—an’ I only done what was right,” he told her firmly. “An’ we both done it accordin’ to what we thought was the facts. At the time—goin’ by what we had—we couldn’t neither one of us done the least bit different an’ looked ourselves square in the face again. An’ it’s what papa woulda done—he would of married Addie if he had been me; he’d of made me marry her if he’d of been here. . . . Anyhow, what’s done, is done—we can’t change it by reproachin’ anybody, er ourselves. It’s what’s ahead that’s botherin’ me now, fer I don’t wanta add no more wrong to what’s already been done. Posey—you didn’t like him, an’ I don’t know’s y’ could, bein’ so diff’runt. He was a queer sorta chap—awful hard on the outside with a soft streak in him that nobody I guess but mom’ suspected. He’d of been awful good to the little chap if he knowed fer sure it was his—he was awful fond o’ children—it’s why folks put up with him when he’d come to their ranch—the children loved him so; an’ I guess he was more’n half sure Addie’s baby was his, anyways; an’ when a man’s got a son, it galls him to think of him callin’ another man papa, an’ I guess that part of it come over him all to oncet an’ he couldn’t stop himself sayin’ what he said. . . . Since I been layin’ here, it’s come over me how I’d feel if *he’d* married Addie, an’ me with her letter sayin’ it’s mine, me thinkin’ it was mine, an’ him ownin’ it to do what he pleased with—treat it any way he’s a mind to—love it er abuse it—an’ me not able to say a word.”

"You're judging Posey by yourself," she reminded him a trifle curtly, because of a feminine instinct to shift the blame from her loved one by seeing the other party in the worst possible light; and she simply wouldn't admit Posey had a "soft side," or any motive but sheer wickedness in taunting Eric. . . . Posey, or any other man couldn't have been so under the influence of liquor that he didn't *know* what a man like Eric would *do*! He meant to make him draw his gun, then he would draw *his* gun, and shoot first! She knew perfectly well how it was—Eric couldn't convince *her*! Soft side to such a man, indeed! A callous, depraved ruffian! . . . She was about to expatiate warmly on her views, but her impulse was checked by something emanating from Eric—the halt that we feel before a wisdom greater than our own. Not noticing her interruption, he went on gently, more as if talking to himself than to her: "I guess men's pretty much alike under their skins when y' git right down to it. They don't think much about havin' children—they don't feel it the way women does—until the little fella's there, right before their eyes, alive an' clingin' to their finger so helpless an' confidin', as if he said, 'I know you won't leave nothin' hurt me, 'cause you're muh dad!' an' then it comes over 'em all of a sudden, 'Here's another little *me* in the world to go on when I'm gone.' It makes a man feel bigger inside, an'—*longer lastin'*, somehow; sorta reachin' out into the future at the same time he's reachin' back into the past to *his* father; an' reachin' out to all his flesh an' blood—feelin' 'em near. Why, it stretches him all over! . . . I don't know's I can put it so's y'll understand."

"I do understand," she said softly. *That*, if he had known it, was one of the things she had been born to understand.

He gave her a grateful sigh. It hadn't been an easy explanation for him, but he had made it with purpose; he felt he must insure her justice, if not her sympathy—he hardly expected that—for the innocent child. The child's innocence had become a cleansing and precious thing to his own soul, the more cleansing and precious because of Addie's depravity. All that he had lacked and lost in her he saw in his little son. Nothing had shaken his faith that the child was his; he found convincing evidence in his own feelings to go with the negative evidence that there was nothing to prove it wasn't his; he regarded the tender emotion flooding him when the baby's hand clasped his finger as "the answer to the blood call," arguing that as he had never felt that way when any other child touched him, he couldn't have felt it unless the child were his own. It was thus his last and most sacred duty to save that helpless innocence and shield it from injury through his wrong-doing, insure his child a capable protection when he was no longer there to stand between it and the world. And out of all the world, his sister was the only one he wanted—the only person strong enough, good enough, wise enough to intrust this sacred duty to. . . . If she'd accept it! . . . Would she? . . . Wouldn't she—when she knew he was dying? . . . He could lay that little helpless child in her arms and feel utterly secure and at peace, ready to go on. . . . Was it right to burden her? Perhaps she'd be glad! If she weren't glad to have it, still she might be glad to make him easy in his mind for those last few days because—she loved him! How could she, after the way he'd treated her? What a miracle she was—any wonderful thing was possible to her! It was wonderful the way she'd seen through Addie—despised her—from the first; so she'd see that Addie wasn't the fit person to bring up his child—he

needn't say it, she'd know . . . and perhaps she'd offer . . . if she'd offer to take the baby! She might—if she understood . . . she'd just said she understood. . . .

He broke a long silence with another grateful sigh and the words: "I thought y'd understand—how I feel about him. I got no doubts on him not bein' my own, an' I want no doubts throwed on him. Even if he warn't—considerin' Posey—I'd treat him as mine an' never leave him suspect he ain't; an' I want him treated—when I'm gone—same as mine, no matter what. Whatever property would of come to me when the estate's divided—if it is—I want he should have. Addie, of course, gits some rights under the law—I dunno jes' what, but she's bound to make trouble if she don't git something; but if y' go kinda-sorta easy with her she won't make more'n she has to—she ain't huntin' trouble with *you*—she knows who butters her bread—so she'll take anything within reason . . . s'long's she ain't got no reason on her side fer to git back at y' like she would if she knew y' had her letter to Posey. Whatever she said er done, she'd call it protectin' herself, her good name, an' her rights. That's why things has got to be left lookin' same as they was—a week ago. . . . Understand, I ain't askin' y' to give him any particular share, er even the half of what y'd of likely give me when it come time to divide—I'm leavin' y' free to do whatever y' see fit to do when the time comes. It's a long ways off yet—he mayn't even be livin'—we can't say as to that; we can only git ready fer what may be—an' prevent what might be—if y' was to tell Addie y'd have no more to do with her, an' why."

Dora visibly recoiled, as he had feared she would and hoped she wouldn't. She had been thinking they were through with Addie for good and all, even if he lived. Oh, *she* knew it wasn't Eric's child—that confession to

Posey proved it; and she wouldn't have him Eric's child, and mothered by such a creature! Eric's arguments were very high-minded, but they weren't *just*. For his own sake—for her father's, whose property this bastard would inherit—she must protest. It was her *plain duty* to protest. . . . She looked at the wan, pinched face and decided to wait until his strength came back; what he needed now was love and understanding.

But he had read her unspoken protest in her face, and answered it with more firmness, almost sternness, than she had ever heard from him: "I'm only askin' the *rights of an innocent child*." Immediately his voice softened, and he told her through the ghost of his old-time smile—the winning smile of confiding affection and contrition his mother had never been able to resist: "All is, Dora, I'm jes' kinda dependin' on y' to back me up to make wrong things right in these last hours—see me through with it when I ain't here an' can't see muhself through, an' I kinda seemed to feel y' won't desert me when I'm gone."

That clinched it for her. She melted almost to tears.

"Anything—everything!" was all she could trust herself to say, moved to her depths by his trust in her integrity and by this proof of their spiritual intimacy. No other way he could have put it would have appealed to so many of her feelings and ideals; and in helping him to atone for his sin she saw herself atoning in a measure for her share in the causes leading to it.

"I want y' to take . . . the boy . . . be his mother . . . an' make him a man like papa."

"I will."

He raised her hand to his lips. As he did so, she was conscious that the main bond holding him to life had slipped away with her promise.

CHAPTER XXV

POSEY's murder and burial was one of those events which rapidly destroy a whole system of thought, or at least throw into shade motives and meanings heretofore dominant, liberating another system until then disregarded, perhaps even unknown. The reconstruction that follows is of necessity a regeneration because it deepens insight and widens the spiritual outlook, if in no other way than the revelation it gives us of the hidden lives of our own hearts. But it was one of the strange elements of their peculiar case that in Dora and Eric the reconstruction should be almost diametrically opposite on the surface, and at the deeper levels of their natures, almost identical. Life lay all behind him, and ahead of her: the discovery of his own soul was the end to which he believed everything had been sent to work out for him, and finding it, he was prepared to die; to her, that end was the beginning—finding her own soul, she was prepared to live. She had discovered her emotional side—love, sympathy, partisanship, the blood call, maternal desire to shield and succor—and with it, the world and its people suddenly meant more to her; meant something quite different when viewed with understanding of its emotions and its temptations. She would become more one with its needs now that she could no longer stand aside blameless and criticise its deeds; her own deeds needed a little too much criticism. She administered it to herself, and wasn't sparing of it. And along with that she felt stirring within her an abounding life, a sense of power born of her loved

yet dreadful responsibility, and found the world more interesting, vivid, real in proportion as its necessities pressed upon her. While Eric lived it could never for a single minute again be "the world where nothing mattered"—everything connected with him mattered so awfully; and what mattered most was to win from him a wan smile or a grateful look; and after that what mattered most was to feel and know herself part and parcel of a vital, struggling, upward-striving world just where she was, with her problems, her obligations, and responsibilities, her work to do—*there*; and through the mysterious influence they had always had on each other, the one acting as a "developing bath" on the other's hidden nature, while his grip on life loosened and the bonds that held him slipped away, her grip tightened, grew more active, potent, determined, and secure. She wanted to do things as she had never wanted to before, but do them now for his sake because he would have to leave so much undone.

For his sake—for the sake of others—what was that impulse eternally stirring in the breast of humanity? Whence came the force impelling to the sacrifice of self and self-seeking and gratification for the benefit of others? It had inspired her mother to endless services for her children; it had inspired her father in his scheme for a community of kindred souls all working for a common aim, the "common good of all"; it had inspired martyrs. . . . What was the mystic significance of "the blood of martyrs"?—of their sacrifices for humanity, for truth, for an ideal? *Deeds!*—not words, but *deeds!* Ideals meant—deeds and nothing else. And deeds meant determination, activity, work; meant, "Stop dreaming, take your spade, dig in and turn sod"; this was the divine obligation, the supreme responsibility—deeds.

"Irresponsibility!"—the word came to her like an inspiration: that was the one general phenomenon pervading the entire community—irresponsibility; and simply because idealism had disappeared, and with it the sense of obligation. For the sense of obligation is a voluntary subservience to an inner ideal, set and cherished for self-attainment. The people about her had no ideals—they lived from day to day, from one expedient to another, under no obligation to do more, or arrive anywhere in the end. At last she understood what had at first amazed and later bewildered her when she plunged into her home surroundings and the community at large fresh from the orderly academic world: long breeding and spontaneous selection among like-minded people had produced those ideals of duty, honor, obligation, and responsibility so dear to her and her father; cross-breeding eliminated the ideals from both strains of blood; American democracy did the rest—substituted the dollar for all measures of worth, and made it the test of position, character, ability, achievement. Money—money—money—she had heard it on every tongue and everywhere she went: "How much did he make on that deal? Smart chap! . . . How much has he got? He's somebody, now you betcher!" . . . But what else could you expect in a community, in a nation of mixed marriages? When the father thought one way and the mother the opposite, they amiably compromised to keep peace in the family by thinking as little as possible and teaching their children nothing either way. They called it "leaving the children free to choose and make their own opinions when they grew up," and felt themselves exhibiting a tolerant Christian spirit in keeping with the high civilization of the times! Thus withered and perished in a single generation what numberless generations had striven for—standards and ideals

of conduct. It was ideals that counted in the end—having or not having them; that made all the real difference there was between people, peoples, nations, races. Deprived of ideals, they had nothing *but* the material world and their senses to go by; they must get what they could—possess, enjoy, ignore—sample life from end to end, “because,” as they said, “you’re a short time living and a long time dead.” . . . And what was American “opportunity for everybody” when put to the test? Only the folly of an individual freedom that ends in a race enslaved to its material self-interests and its passions. *That* was what “America, the melting-pot of the nations,” really meant: moral ideals fused with base metal—vulgarity, ignorance, bumptiousness, irresponsibility—*brass*; common brass—that was the crucible product when turned out to cool into attitudes, efforts, relationships, conduct. . . .

Every day that she thought about it sitting there with Eric, sometimes talking with him, but more often silently watching the clouds through the window, it became clearer and clearer to her that what the world most needed now was ideals—but ideals that didn’t begin or end by violating fundamental laws of nature and heredity; needed a revival of the old ideals of loyalty, duty, obligation, responsibility, but without the trammels of the old ways of doing things; needed, that is, a neo-Puritanism without crass narrow-mindedness and bigotry, but with the elements of self-restraint and self-abnegation from which Puritanism drew the strength of its discipline, the power of its devotion. In that word—neo-Puritanism—she heard her call to a new life for her soul: she would do her little share in her little place to help forward a neo-Puritanism that would uplift and regenerate, strengthen the world of her day, and at the same time infuse it with a spiritual essence the old Puri-

tanism of her father's generation had never known, a sympathy with humanity in its failures as well as its upward strivings and attainments; a joy of service for others; a wider outlook upon the world; a deeper insight into its meanings, and an expansion into those higher realms of thought and feeling waiting for all souls to proclaim and take possession of. Thus she "found herself," and to her her soul stood as repository and guardian of her new ideals, the instrument through which they were to be made real in her home and in the tasks her hands found to do. It was through these revelations, activated by self-devotion, that peace came to her, and home at last was home.

To Eric, the world and its necessities, its opportunities, its rewards and punishments had faded away; the animal and all its desires had nearly died within him. Except for his pain, which didn't trouble him when he was quiet, he seemed to have little or no feeling of any kind left in him, and lay for hours with a wistful look on his pinched face as if he inwardly were saying: "The world has told me all its secrets, but there is yet one secret, greater than all, I must know before I renounce life utterly and cast it from me."

It was this look, from out the deeps of him, that found reflection in Dora's face. It was on this last secret that their spirits met and were at one. What lay on the other side of death? Where was God and how was he to be found? Out of the ruin of old standards, hopes, desires, there had arisen in both of them an almost passionate yearning for something greater than themselves; for a power, a being, at once secure and benign, infinitely wise, yet intimately personal in his relation with them, who could say the final word of justice in all this tangle of elements; who could point the way to higher things; who, if he didn't utterly approve, at least couldn't

utterly condemn them for their ignorances and mistakes. Hell, as a possibility, in the old hell-fire, orthodox sense of the word, never entered their heads. Bringing children up without religion as they had been reared has at least that merit—it doesn't distemper the soul with such fears when it begins to reach out into the dark for God as a personal friend. God might be very cold and distant, very high Brahmin in his attitude toward his shuffling, spineless, timid handiwork, but he was utterly just because utterly wide awake to all things; and it was the idea of his alertness to the fine shades of their case, his ability to sort the sheep from the goats of their tangled motives and misjudgments and deeds that pricked both Dora and Eric into an active desire for him as a friend. They needed him *now*. Compared with her need now, Dora felt her former need only the yearnings of a child; Eric had had nothing but vague yearnings until then. They were willing to take their punishment for everything, provided only it was fair, giving due discount to ignorance; indeed, they would have been grateful for a punishment that would drop on them visibly and immediately, and be over and done with. There was something actually appalling to them in the way their punishment seemed to creep silently underground into the future, like a root out of which sprouted a poison-ivy vine whose tendrils seized on every life connected with their own, its shiny, noxious leaves flaunting the word *disgrace*, for themselves and for those dear to them. Always running on ahead, on and on, on and on ahead were the consequences of their ignorances and ill deeds, and they were too submerged and depressed with that idea to consider how the rule works both ways—the *good* that men do lives after them, also, running on and on ahead to bring joy or peace, courage, hope, security to generations yet unborn.

For some time neither spoke to the other of these thoughts. The whole family had entered upon a period of waiting for Eric's recovery in which nothing after the first day seemed materially to change. The general situation was torturing and tortuous. Mrs. Feruseth's love and solicitations were wearying, and worrying to a degree almost beyond endurance. If her habit of making people live life twice, once in action and once in talk, had been distressing before, it was fairly maddening with this damning secret to be kept, and to which, with artless questions and endless recurrences, she and Polly always seemed to be getting nearer and nearer. At least it seemed so to Eric's guilty conscience. He felt every reference to the fatal day as a direct thrust through the cover which to his mind was all too thin even at its best. In reality, though, his mother, far from suspecting there was anything to be concealed by him, was trying to conceal from him her own piteous misgivings; and her questioning was only her clutching at every straw of hope to keep her swimming in the belief that he would live: her knowing exactly how it all happened—if he had had a fall, or a strain, or if somebody had struck him—couldn't he remember that?—how he got home afterward—and every ache and pain and symptom—all these little items, carefully checked up against other little items of like sort she remembered about neighbors who had ruptured veins or heart valves, helped her to tell herself that things weren't as bad as they seemed. It was to this end that she rummaged his recollections of the fatal day until at last in desperation he told her: "Mom', y' pick me like a crow."

It was the only really cruel thing he had ever said to her. She went away in tears, but forgave him presently because "he was too sick to know what he was saying." She never saw it as the characterization of a life habit

that made her merciless to the sensitive. She pried in order to find the tender spots and anoint them the more richly with her love and sympathy, losing none of the precious balm through misdirection; after that, there was nothing she didn't stand ready to do—except stand aside and let the Great Healer come in silence and do the doing!

That kind of love and sympathy no longer reached her son; in a single night he had become a being of another spiritual world than hers. How petty to him now seemed her pleasures, her hopes, desires, ambitions, even her sufferings. How could *she* know what it means to a man to face his own soul and God with murder on his hands? She couldn't, and no love or sympathy could bring her to the knowledge and understanding of his sufferings, his longings, or of the deep world open to his understanding within his own heart. Into that world she could never follow him; back from it to her world he could never go, and he had simply left his mother out of account in what remained of his life. That, to her, was the most terrible experience life held—to be left out of account by her loved ones for whom she would so gladly have died. Fortunately, she only dimly apprehended the fact, and excused what she felt on the ground that he was "too sick to want anything."

In those days, Dora felt for and pitied her mother more than she had ever done; yet her mother's determination to clutch at her son, and have all there was to the bitter end only nerved the daughter to a sterner defense of his peace and security through which alone he could pick up the broken threads and reconstruct his shattered life. That he was inwardly at work on something of the sort—a replanning on a new pattern—she felt sure; but it was he who finally opened the subject between them by saying some time after his

mother had gone out, that he was sorry he had told her she picked him like a crow, even though it was true. "It was pretty hard on her, seein' that she didn't mean no harm by it, an' never does," he admitted ruefully. "I wisht I'd said it diff'runt—I hate fer to see anybody cry, an' her—now——"

"Oh, she isn't crying now," Dora interrupted, who had just come from the kitchen. "Polly and I convinced her that you didn't really mean it—probably didn't know you said it, and she's out there getting a chicken ready for you and singing! At least, she was humming—which is as near as she ever gets at her happiest. She has her compensations, you know, Eric, that we don't always take into consideration—it gives her eternal joy to feel that she can bear anything, forgive anything, and still keep right on doing for those she loves. I didn't understand it for a long, long time—but it's how she tests herself and proves herself true to her own nature; to her motherhood; to her ideals. And she gets her reward out of a little appreciation afterward—gets her proof, both that she did well in forgiving, and that a forgiving spirit wins a reward!"

"Is that how it is?" Her glib and critical explanation had illuminated him considerably and he thought he saw quite deeply into his mother and the inner workings of her heart. He felt very tender to her then, and repeated that he wished he hadn't hurt her in the first instance—she had enough to bear.

"But the reward!" Dora reminded. "It's what I rushed in to see you about. She wants to know if you would rather have her make you hot clear chicken broth, or a cold clear chicken jelly?"

"Food—eatin'—soups—jellies—how little it all matters——"

"Tut, tut! It matters a lot," she chided him cheer-

fully, and for at least the twentieth time. "I seem to have a tooth set for nice cool chicken jelly, how about your tooth?"

"I guess it would taste kinda-sorta good," he agreed with a feeling of relish, and she tripped off to tell her mother that "chicken jelly was nothing short of an inspiration, for he was fairly longing for it," and hastened back saying a prayer to the recording angel as she went, and told Eric that mother was perfectly happy again—happy as she could be with him sick—and actually pleased that he had been cross, the reward was so satisfying—he wanted what she had planned!

"I dunno as that excuses me," he said. "I still wisht I hadn't said it, fer thez already so many things I wisht I hadn't done. I lay here, countin' 'em up from way back, fur's I can remember an' sayin' over each one of 'em: 'I'm sorry I done that—I wouldn't of, if I could of seen how it would keep workin' on an' on—I wouldn't do it now if I had it to do over! . . .' Not so many that I done to mom'—she somehow always understood and was ready to forgive, like she is now. . . . An' that makes it only seem meaner in me! . . . But things I done to papa, while he was livin' an' after he was dead. . . . An' thez one thing I done . . . to him an' to you . . . that time I read the letter he left. . . ." For a minute he thought the words would never come out, for that sin, in the new light that had dawned on his soul, was unique—the one sin that a perfectly just God could not palliate or tolerate. But Eric had made up his mind to confess it if it took his last breath. At this point Dora burst forth impulsively: "Oh, Eric dear, I'm so glad you spoke of that! I've been afraid it was worrying you—that you had it on your mind, and yet I didn't like to bring it up for fear. . . . But isn't it strange the way things work

out as we live life, and grow? To-day, I'm *glad*—glad you did it, and just the way you did it, for it made me feel so sorry for you. It brought me a different understanding of—all sorts of things I had never thought much about. And besides, I'm glad you read it——”

“I didn't read it—I couldn't,” he put in hastily. “Only a few words here and there, scraps like. I don't know what's in it—I thought y'd be glad to know that—it's part of the reason I spoke of it now. Nobody knows his secret but you.”

Instantly it came to her, like a flash of inspiration from a source outside herself: “If I read it to him now of my own accord that will shrieve him of what he feels his sin.” It seemed as if her father himself commanded: “Read it to my son.” Thus she read it to him at last, her hand clasping his.

Neither spoke for some time after she had finished, but it seemed to her that she could feel his burden rolling from him. It was he who said the first words, quoting from the letter: “‘I lost God on the plains’—that's what hit me when I read it—it was like a blow between the eyes—‘I lost God,’ an' why did he tell anybody he lost God? It haunted me—kep' comin' up wherever I went or whatever I was doin'. One minute I seem to know what he meant—next I don't! It's awful lonesome out on the plains—y' git an awful empty feelin' that seems to go all through y'; if he meant that, I understand. Then I git thinkin', ‘What was it he lost?’ I don't know what he *had* 'fore he lost it, do you?”

The question took her aback in more ways than one—it was the question she had been struggling with so long unavailingly. After a moment's hesitation she ventured: “Why, he had God—felt God with him——” only to have him fling back with considerable animation,

"But how did he *have* God? How did he *feel* him?" and she was obliged to confess she didn't know.

He was visibly disappointed and fell back on the pillow murmuring, "I thought *you* would," almost reproachfully, in a way that made her somehow feel guilty and lacking. But as she said nothing, he went on: "I don't believe in God most o' the time—y' can't when yer out on the range alone; ner y' can't when y' see how things happen to folks that don't deserve sufferin' fer anything they done themselves—see the way things is put upon the helpless an' innocent: I can't see the right er justice in it—that's when I don't believe in God, an' I'd ruther they'd be no God at all than a bad God. But then I can't give it up that there must be a God, fer if there ain't, who made it all? Where did it all come from, an' how did it come here as it is, the world and everything? There's life—what becomes of yer life when y' die? An' what makes y' die? Why should bein' hit one place an' not another change y' from the livin' to the dead in a single minute? And after that—*what?*"

"And after that—what?" she echoed. "God knows!" The answers were as much beyond her as they were beyond him. She looked into his eager, hungry face and thought passionately: "Oh, if I only knew—if I could only tell him what lies beyond!" She remembered the longings she had felt at college when the organ played and the veil seemed about to lift between her spirit and something vast and pure; the veil that had never lifted of itself and that she had almost ceased to try to lift, or even hope to see lifted in this life; remembered how she had fought it out with herself alone, renounced the hope, contented herself with the moral law and inner righteousness. How meagre it was—how little it fed and filled the tortured, hungry soul!

His eyes still begged of her, so she ventured: "Well, we know at least that God is just and wise and good—" and saw the light in his face go out: he had asked her for bread and she had given him a stone! It was a personal God—God the father, the friend and guide—that he was groping to find, not a dish of attributes! The same God she was groping for, but felt shy of confessing it.

"I know all that," he returned with weary impatience. "He wouldn't *be* God if he wasn't; but that ain't anything y' can *have*—it's only what he *is*—it ain't *him*; an' that ain't what papa had—it couldn't of been, and anyways, he musta *thought* he had something, er he couldn't of *thought* he *lost* it! An' it musta been something he cared a lot fer, too, er he wouldn't never have spoke that way about it. His speakin' of it shows how much he cared; his carin' shows how much he had . . . er thought he had; it's same thing, as I see it. An' what I'm askin' is, if *he* had God so's to know him, why can't you an' me have him so's to know him?"

She told him: "That's what *I* have been asking, too!" and saw the light come back to his face. He felt near to her again—they weren't so far apart if they were both asking the same question, and with renewed eagerness he contributed: "Well, I remember something he said oncet, years an' years ago—I was five or six, mebbe. Mom' was learnin' me to pray to one of her saints, I guess it was, fer she was holdin' up a picture—I dunno what's become of it—she usta have it on the wall of her room in the old house—I ain't seen it since we moved here; but, anyhow, papa come in an' caught her doin' it, an' he says to her—y' know the way he usta give orders—he says, 'I want my boy learnt to pray direct to his God—*God is free to all*,' he says. I don't remember more'n that—what mom' said er did, though I kinda

remember there was some quarrellin'. She answered him back, an' him her, both pretty sharp; but I was too little to understand, an' besides, I was scared, he looked so . . . not exactly cross, but hard . . . an' I see mom' was scared, too; so I hid muh head in her lap. . . . I guess mom' was always a little scared of him, same's the rest of us. She musta been that time, fer I can't remember her ever trying to learn me muh prayers again after that . . . though mebbe she did, an' I've fergot. . . . But, anyways, what I started to tell y'—them words, *God is free to all*, an' the way he said it—as if he felt awful sure of it—awful sure of God an' that y' could have him—they keep comin' to me as I lay here, thinkin' an' wonderin'; an' I keep sayin', 'If papa was *right*—if God's free to all, why he must be free to me, same's the rest . . . if only I knew how to go to work to *find* him! . . .'

"It's what I seem to be waitin' fer now—it's what keeps me here when y'd think I'd ought to die an' be done with it all: I wanta be *sure* about God—I wanta feel him reachin' out an' kinda takin' hold of muh hand an' tellin' me he understands exactly *how* I come to do that . . . all of it, from the beginnin' up to last minute—up to *now*; an' that he approves of what seems to me right to do fer the little chap. . . . If he could say to me: 'Yer on the right track at last, Eric—go ahead.' . . . If he's the God I want, he could say it! . . . Then it seems to me he'd make it right with Posey—explain how I didn't know the truth till after. It seems like God could make everything all right, somehow, if he wanted . . . er if y' had him . . . if he was yer *friend*. . . . But I dunno—I only keep thinkin' an' thinkin', layin' here; keep askin' what's he really like, an' how can I find him. When I find him, I'll be ready to go on."

"Oh, my dear—my beloved dear!" she cried fervently. "If I could only help you to find him! If I could only comfort you! But I'm groping—I've always been groping—and I haven't gotten as far with all my gropings as you have—through suffering. It's you who must help me!"

Her appeal brought him a wonderful moment. The last barrier between them seemed to melt; there was nothing they could not talk about as equals. It might be his part to help her as much as she had helped him; to leave her as a legacy something of the spirit, for he had nothing else. If he found God for himself, he would be finding God for her! He smiled then, a smile old with suffering and the wisdom of pain, young with a new dawn.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE peace of a common understanding, which is itself spiritual and almost divine, settled upon brother and sister, but it was from him rather than from her that it radiated through the home, stilling his mother's jealousy and forebodings, even while she realized that there was no perceptible change in him for the better and that he was day by day slipping from her hold. But she worked on, tirelessly cooking choice dishes to tempt his appetite, endlessly encouraging herself with "Something will rouse him before long, and he'll start to mend—mend fast when he does start. He needs rousing, that's all. Perhaps if he could see Addie and the baby, that would."

She had not yet seen the baby. Her visit to the ranch had been nipped in the bud by Eric's sudden return on the day she was to make it; yet even while she was longing to take his child in her arms, she was telling herself she could never have Addie over—she would infest the whole house and set all their teeth on edge; and that she must have Addie over—for Eric's sake; and just couldn't for Dora's sake; and ought to—for the baby's sake; and wouldn't do it—for everybody's sake! In the secrecy of her bosom Mrs. Feruseth now called Addie "that pest."

Addie, as usual, settled the matters for all and sundry, by pounding over as soon as she was able without waiting to be asked.

Dora had written, informing her of the general state of affairs, giving the explanation she and Eric had agreed

upon, and Addie hadn't deigned a reply by so much as a verbal message through Olaf, who had carried the note over. She was stewing the reply in the secrecy of her bosom with an amount of spleen and caution unusual even for her. As another sample of the way things "worked out" when launched in the world, Dora's generosity had proved a boomerang, returning on her own head with a large increase of Addie's spite; for the unaccustomed affluence, ease, and consideration which Addie had enjoyed for two weeks—and would shortly lose as things stood—made Eric's "rights to his share of the property" a paramount and urgent necessity; and under the combined influence of all the circumstances, and a son and heir besides, she had become exceedingly bumptious. She wasn't in the least sorry to have Eric out of the house, for she wasn't even pretending to herself any more that she cared for him, though she meant to keep up the fiction to him as long as it served her turn; but she had come to the place where she pitied herself dreadfully, and the longer she had lain in bed, waited on hand and foot, the more she felt how hard things were, and how she had missed the best and spoiled things for herself by letting Posey Burnham get away from her and allowing herself to be "dragged off by Eric." Distance, and rumors of Posey's phenomenal luck in Utah, had lent enchantment to what was always a glamoured view of him; and she now regarded Eric's moral determination to do right by her as his having "forced her" into a hasty marriage, unwilling on her part, and without giving her so much as a day to think it over. That was the explanation she had worked up for Posey when he came; and to excuse herself in case of reproaches, she had embroidered it with such additions as that Eric had threatened her life if she didn't marry him, he was so crazy over her; that he had told her Posey

had gone to California, and "somebody else told her he was married to a girl out there," and "somebody else said they heard he was dead." So when Eric didn't come home for a week she was glad; when he didn't come home for two weeks, or send her a line, she called it "skunky treatment from any husband, sick er not sick"; when the third week was half over without a word from any of the family, she decided that Dora had "put him up to it"—she was "keeping him away from his lawful wife, trying to separate them, plotting something"—all of which she confided to the nurse, and that *she* was plotting a few little things on her own account, one being to "give *him* a lesson he'd never fergit long's he lived, on how a wife should ought to be treated, an' would be, long's she was that wife."

"I wouldn't blame him till I knew for sure," advised the nurse.

"Blame him! I'm blamin' *her*—coldest, hardest, stuck-upest fish in petticoats ever got into God's country! As fer that *boy*—why she simply *cruddles* him!—gives him a look that cruddles his thoughts in his brain so he can't say boo to her. But she couldn't never cruddle me, lemme tell y'!"

And so it went on and on in the intervals of more pressing occupations about herself and the baby, a steady stream of fiction in which Addie saw Dora trying to get the better of her, and herself coming out always victorious in the fray, until she had hearted herself up—and also committed herself in the eyes of her nurse—for a personal attack on the enemy's camp. She even worked herself into the pleasing belief that the Lord himself had specially provided her with a double-barrelled excuse—a new baby and a sick husband—for her invasion. She considered herself amply able to provide her own ammunition, and to dictate the terms of treaty and in-

demnity, which latter were to be "fair." In her vocabulary, "fair" meant generous when applied to the other side; generous meant munificent; munificent meant lavish to the last degree; it only needed a little incubation to effect the change, and a humble "allowance" would hatch a fortune. In the winter, just after her marriage, she would have considered fifty dollars a month a "fair allowance" for Eric from the estate; but as she rode along on that day when the baby was three weeks old, she could distinctly hear her horses' hoof beats telling her, "Five thousand a year—it's little enough—she's cleanin' up ten—he'd ought to have half—five thousand a year—it's no more'n I can spend"—and with this inspiring tune singing in her ears, and no other announcement of her visit than a loud "Hello, Polly!" her team clattered up to the door of her mother-in-law's house.

The instant consternation written on Polly's face—a look which Addie saw repeated when Mrs. Feruseth hurried to the door—stares without a shade of welcome, though Addie held the new baby conspicuously in the foreground, decided her to take the aggressive before she got the cold shoulder if not something worse. As she had already decided there was "something up," she felt certain of it when after the stare, Mrs. Feruseth could only manage a bewildered "Why, Addie—is that you?" showing herself too much disconcerted by the arrival even to say, "Won't you get out and come in?" which the common hospitalities of the country makes automatic.

Addie noted the omission and hastily prepared to get out before she was asked not to; but first she flung the gauntlet by demanding sharply: "You got my husband here? Where is he?"

His mother's wits came back at that—Addie's tone

and manner were even more unexpected than her visit. *She* guessed at once that there was "something up," and her mother instinct was bristling in a minute, alert, protective, aggressive, though concealed with silence and art.

Addie didn't suspect it—she thought she had cowed her mother-in-law; and since it seemed a good beginning, and likely to reveal "what *was* up" in short order, Addie repeated in a louder, more peremptory tone: "Is my husband *here*, I ast you? If he ain't here, thez no need of me botherin' to git out—all I wanta know is where he *is*, an' git him. He's left me alone fer three whole weeks without a word, an' me jes' confined. It's a measly shame fer a man to treat his wife like that—don't care who the man is—I won't stand fer it."

"He's here, but——"

Polly saved the situation by breaking out with a joyous whoop, "Why, that's Eric's new baby she's got with her!" having worked her little mind to this conclusion slowly, for she had somehow expected to see Eric, not Addie, with his new baby, and hadn't quite taken in at first whose new baby that was on Addie's knee, except that it was probably Addie's since she had it with her; nothing Polly would let herself make a fuss over. "It's the one he was tellin' us he had!" she cried. "Oh, ain't it cute! Oh, say—I wanta hold it an' play with it."

Mrs. Feruseth reached up for the baby and laid it in Polly's arms while Addie, rejecting further assistance, clambered down.

"Well!" she exclaimed, shaking out her rumpled finery and straightening her hat to draw attention to her new clothes. "Well." She stalked boldly into the kitchen as if she belonged there, though she was still trying to decide whether it would be better to show

general possession by taking off her outer wraps, or by taking her husband without a hint that she had thought of staying—just take him and go! To gain an extra few seconds she admonished Polly: "Don't drop the baby, now! You be real careful!" then faced her mother-in-law with another "Well?" delivered with a rising inflection and a look that said a dozen different things at once, each a little more insulting, a little more unforgivable than the last, the whole of her summing up into a defiant stare: "I'm the wife, I'll have you know!" Addie the wife, with her complete claims come to pick him to the bone!

In that moment, Mrs. Feruseth learned what hate meant. The vulgar, grasping, inconsiderate pestiferousness of the woman!—she was sheer brute when seen against the background of Eric lying there day after day, so wasted and wan, so patient and gentle and thoughtful of everybody. The woman was a vulture. It was a crime against nature—against God and man—that Eric had been trapped into marriage with her! . . . Why hadn't Dora forbidden it? Why didn't she come now and do something to forbid Addie's seeing him—get her away from the house before she did—Heaven knows what? She was capable of anything, that *hyena*, to gain her ends. She had come only to make trouble—more trouble, as if they hadn't enough. . . . Well, she would not be allowed—if Olaf had to be called in to *throw* her out of the house. She'd discover that, wife or no wife, Eric still had a mother who would not stand by and see him pounced on by wolves and coyotes and never lift a voice in protest. . . .

At that moment Dora, unconscious of Addie's arrival, stepped into the kitchen, and thus at last the two confronted each other face to face. It didn't need Mrs. Feruseth's almost inaudible "Dora, here's Addie—"

to name them to each other—they *knew*. Something in each cried out the name and added: "She's worse than I thought!" Then each took a step back to plant herself more firmly on her feet while she raked the other over with her eyes from top to toe, in the swift appraising way of women who know they are enemies, and have only a moment in which to prepare for armed neutrality or war.

Thought Dora: "What a creature! Cheap, bold, flashy . . . but what are you doing *here*?"

Thought Addie: "Glad I put on my best clo'es after all to ride over—she'll see she ain't all the style there is in this part the country. . . . But what ails her? What's she look at me like that fer? What have I caught 'em all doin' er concealin', anyways? Well, it certainly is now er never, but I guess Miss Primmy can't act no quicker ner surer than what I can: *I'm the wife!*" and without further greeting than her stare, she demanded haughtily: "Where's my husband at? You got him here still? I've come fer him."

"Oh!" cried Dora, the word rapped out of her by her astonishment, and "Oh!" again in a different tone—dismay, if Addie could have read that, thinking of Eric whom she had just left asleep. "You've—come—for—him?"

"What else?" retorted Addie, now sure of her ground, and proud of her success. "Whaddidja think? Think y' could keep him forever away from his wife and child, and her only jes' gone through a hard confinement an' 'most died? I may be some fool, but I ain't all fool. I can see fur's the next through a stone with a hole in it. Well, I see—and I been seein'—quite a lot. You chose your chanct to git him back under your thumb when his wife was laid up sick—hard and fast in bed so she couldn't do nothing——"

"But *he's* been sick in bed," Dora interrupted, dumfounded at these insinuations, and not knowing how to meet them and protect Eric.

"Sick in bed the whole of three weeks on account of a *drunk*?—well, I think it!" Addie gave a derisive snort. "Tell that to Polly, not to me. Three *days*—that's what his drunks cost—I know, fer I've seen 'em. If he had been sick as all that—in bed three weeks—one o' you folks would of left me know it, and not a word outa one of y' after that first letter, and me—his wife—mother of his child—layin' there worryin', first what happened to him, then what schemes is bein' hatched and concocted while I'm helpless. If there hadn't been schemin' of some sort I wouldn't of been kep' in the dark the way I was, that's certain."

Dora immediately realized the misplay she had made, and tried to remedy it by admitting generously, "I'm awfully sorry—it was my fault entirely," wondering how she could have been so stupid as not to see in the first place what she was laying up by not treating Addie as a true and noble wife deserves to be treated by a considerate and affectionate sister-in-law. Of course, Dora simply couldn't, and hadn't; but she had never dreamed that Addie would read her silence full of ulterior purposes, and use it as an excuse to come dumping in on them in this wild way, unexpected way.

Addie snorted again. "Your fault! I should say yes. *He* nev' wouldda treated me like that if you hadn't of put him to it; not him—he ain't got the backbone, the nerve. When he does a thing like this here—goin' off and leavin' his wife—he does it because he's been put up to it by somebody a damn sight sharper and more schemin' than what he is, and by somebody that can put the thumbscrews onta him if he don't mind what they say he's to do."

"You entirely misunderstand the situation—" began Dora; only to have Addie cut in rudely: "Not much I don't. You never liked me—I knowed that from the first—thez no use puttin' up any false pretenses on that jes' to be perlite; you never liked me, and you always wanted to come between he and I, always meant to—when you got yer chanct. And you got it when you got him here sick an' soberin' up after a drunk when he's soft an' easy an' ashamed of himself an' willin' to do what anybody tells him fer the sake of makin' up; an' you kep' him here, sick and well—er kep' him sick fer all I know to the *contrairy*—could if it suited yer purposes—anyways, *you kep' him here* till you could arrange whatever schemes you got in yer head to—to put me outa my rights."

Dora froze with anger at this accusation. "Stop and think what you're sayin," she warned.

That was all Addie needed to drive her on. She had felt the subtle impact of both mother's and daughter's contempt and resistance, felt herself breaking down inwardly under it; knew if she gave way an inch on her chosen ground they would have her, and she would go or stay on their terms forever, and—she had come to make her own terms. Flustered with these thoughts, she quite lost her head and blazed out: "Schemes—yes, schemes! I say it again so's there won't be no mistake, fer I got all the proof I want now that you been tryin' to alienate my husband's affections and I guess no matter what *he* says, the law'll have something to say about that. Where is he now?—that's what I been askin' ever since I set foot in the house—and before—where is he *now*? What's been done with him? What's been done *to* him? You got him locked up in that mystery room? I'll see what he has to say fer himself first—see if he'll come home with his wife er no——"

Still speaking, she attempted to crowd past Dora, and reach the hall, and found her way barred by a firm young arm suddenly stretched out, a strong hand grasping the door-knob and holding it tight, a firm voice telling her commandingly: "I cannot allow you to see my brother. He is far too sick to have any one rushing in on him without warning."

The qualifying clause Addie didn't, or wouldn't hear; the pointblank refusal upset what little common sense she had left. She clinched her fist and stepped closer—for a moment Dora expected a blow in the face—and hissed: "You can't! *You*—can't—allow me—to see—*my husband*—and the father—of my child!"

"The less you say about 'the father of your child,' the better."

Dora's retort was quietly enough spoken, but the tone and the piercing look that went with it were freighted with significance for Addie. What did they mean? The fire suddenly went out of her and she stood there limp.

Just how their encounter would have worked out from this point on, Dora could never subsequently decide, though she believed that her determination to shield her brother and her loathing for the woman would have driven her on until she ended by declaring her possession of the Posey Burnham letter—a course she thanked God for saving her from with all its attendant risks, suspicions, and entanglements. Objectively, however, she owed her immediate salvation to Polly. That incorrigible devourer of passing shows, the forgotten baby precariously in her arms, was perched upon the edge of the rocker leaning forward to stare and stare her fill. Delicious meal of human events! At last her darling Dody was "doing Addie up," as Polly had always believed she could if she had the chance!—or would be in a minute, though the odds did seem just a

little in favor of Addie, particularly as that other valiant champion of her flesh and blood, Polly's mother, stood by like one in a trance and moved not, nor spoke—a state of affairs that divided Polly's interest and her balance on the rocker. With all her little heart Polly was betting on Dora and hating Addie, and when her fist threateningly clinched and Dora's hand shot out to the door-knob. . . . Oh! . . . Polly gasped. Unconsciously her little body slipped forward to the very last edge of the chair that she might see her sister's face, jump to her rescue, scratch Addie's eyes out, do something, it didn't matter what, so long as Dora was saved . . . and when Dora said *that!* . . . From the silence that dropped on Addie, Polly knew it was something momentous to have said, though its meaning was beyond her. She leaned forward the better to grasp that meaning. The chair shot from under her one way, her feet from under another, and she found herself sitting on the floor. For all that, she managed to keep the baby uppermost and in just the right position from which its startled cry could best ring through the house and all outdoors.

Addie wheeled on her.

"Oh, me child!" she screeched, pouncing on it and snatching it away. "You've killed it, you little brat—and I told you to be careful! Oh, mamma's darling baby boy, what have they done to it?—Where have they hurt it?" And with that, she sank upon the rocker and dissolved into tears.

CHAPTER XXVII

It is at once the boasted glory and the secret shame of our civilization that strength so often compromises with weakness simply because it is weakness and can't stand up to its own fight, though it has provoked the fight and ought to be left to the enjoyment of the consequences as meted out by justice;—another instance proving that the weak shall inherit the land of the pioneer. In this case "civilization" took the lead. Addie the warlike was one thing; Addie the weeping quite another, both to herself and to her husband's family. Now that they had beaten her, they were willing to make concessions, and she was willing to listen to reason and explanations—"fairly grovelling," thought Dora. But then, never in her life had Addie experienced so complete a right-about-face in her attitudes; but then—never had she faced a situation where she had so much to gain and to lose, and all and forever inside the next ten minutes. She saw this with her usual shrewdness—saw the finality of whatever was going to happen—after she had shed a sufficient number of tears to clear her mental vision and relieve the tension of her nerves; and during the weeping, the suspicions and false assumptions with which she had been bolstering up her case with the family all ran out; and something very like fear ran in when Mrs. Feruseth explained haltingly: "Eric's very, very sick, Addie, with heart trouble—that's the main reason we didn't write; we didn't want to worry you while you was so sick yourself. A letter always does, and I didn't have time to go over myself and see you. We ain't sure he'll ever be well again, though we

hope for the best and do all we can for him that love and nursing can do." Tears sprang and rolled down her cheeks; they were more convincing to Addie than a doctor's certificate.

"You don't say it's bad as that?" she exclaimed, genuinely shocked. She hadn't wanted Eric to die—she didn't hate him as much as all that; indeed, she knew then she didn't hate him at all—she hated *it*, the whole family situation, and her mistake in marrying into it without first discovering what she was getting with Eric and losing with Posey Burnham. She wasn't malevolent, only meanly spiteful to those who failed to serve her self-interest: she hadn't stuff enough in her for malevolence. But when it came to Eric's dying—and now! How she'd be left! Everything depending on Dora's generosity to the child—about whom she evidently had her own views. After this scene would Dora ever . . . Addie glanced at her furtively, wondering what lay hidden in those words: "The less you say about the father of your child, the better." Certainly, they didn't bode well for the child, and the child was all she'd have to go on if Eric died. But even yet the situation might be saved—through caution and a proper humility toward the victors. Addie asked timorously: "Ain't there some hope that he'll git well and be about same as he was?"

"Of course there's hope," answered mother and daughter; but their tone convinced Addie to the contrary: they were only pretending a hope to conceal the truth from themselves; and she began to sob afresh, punctuating with "Poor Eric! Poor Eric!" and after a series of prolonged sobs: "He was always s-so g-o-o-d to me!"

Addie watched the effect over the baby's head on which her own was bowed, and saw Dora's lip curl. She

was despising Addie more with every passing minute; and for this exhibition, which Dora characterized as "crocodile tears," she felt a keener disgust than for the vulgar temper and bumptiousness preceding it. She could forgive that for its sheer brute genuineness! However, her mother's face had softened—she wasn't hating Addie now, and had even warmed to her a little, feeling that Eric was getting some small part of his due in appreciation from his wife at last.

Then for some moments no one spoke. Addie rocked the baby and sobbed upon it; Mrs. Feruseth rocked Polly, who sobbed on her, endeavoring to keep her little water-works flowing at just the right pressure to insure sympathy, yet not so voluminously as to obscure the passing show, in which these teary minutes were but an interlude; Dora remained a statue guarding the way to Eric. By a common, subconscious agreement, his family was leaving the next move to his wife, and it was she who broke the silence she felt boring her very soul, whimpering: "Perhaps I better go home now," equally fearsome lest she be taken up and advised to go, leaving everything undecided, or invited to stay. She had reached her limits on nerves and wanted to get out from under those staring eyes.

Addie's whimper had been directed at Mrs. Feruseth, who answered it by gently stroking Polly's hair and kissing her, thus adroitly avoiding the call to commit herself, one way or the other, for or against Addie, or Eric, or anybody; but Dora took Addie up with a cold "I think it would be wise," only to catch a reproachful look from her mother; for as Dora said it, it sounded much too much like turning Addie out of the house; and with that thought, her mother's hospitality came back—the hospitality of the wide places of the earth that says every guest taking the trouble to come to your

house shall at least have a meal at your table. She was also beginning to see the guiding finger of Providence in this visit: a man's wife and child—after all, they are the fundamental facts of his life—the calls that reach him even on his death-bed; and if Eric could hear that call of the flesh to the flesh once more, feel the thrill of "his own" through his wasted body, perhaps . . . Those were things Dora didn't, and couldn't be expected to understand; and a wife did, a mother must. When you had *your own* close in your arms—what a difference! Under these impulses she issued a cautiously worded invitation: "It's an awful long trip for you to go right back over, Addie—and with the baby, too. If you was to stop the night, and we could prepare Eric gradually so it wouldn't be too much of a surprise to him——"

"No, I better go—I'm sure I better go home now and wait till he sends fer me—er you send," whined Addie, mollified and seeing she could make a graceful retreat. At any rate, if Dora 'had' her, she now 'had' Dora, and could throw it up to Eric later: "I come over soon's I was outa bed, and your sister wouldn't leave me see you—told me to go home; and I went, so's to have no trouble with your fam'ly. Blame her, not me, that I didn't see you." And thinking thus, she rose with the baby and moved toward the door.

But her graceful retreat and teary good-bys were interrupted by Eric's bell faintly sounding through the walls, and leaving Addie with her good-by hand still outstretched, Dora went to him in haste.

"Addie's here. I heard the baby cry," he greeted her.

"Oh, Eric, I'm so sorry it waked you! But you needn't see her—we've explained, and she's just going."

"I want to see her."

"But, Eric—" For a moment his words were a

shock to the old Puritan in her; but immediately the new woman he had helped to make realized that he had been waiting for just that—to say farewell to his wife: he would never wish to see her again. What Dora missed seeing was that he was wanting to say farewell to his dead self, of which Addie and all that went with her was the outer symbol. He was testing the severance of himself with life; he believed it accomplished, but Addie would prove it. If he could see her again without the least feeling—no desire, no bitterness, no condemnation for her, no excuses for himself; see her only as a human being whom he at last understood, coldly, impartially, and had died to. . . . He had been asking himself for days if he could see Addie that way, or even see her again; the day after “that night” he had believed he would die of horror and hate if he had to see her at all. But horror and hate had died in his heart—he could even pity her a little for what she was, and more for what she wasn’t. How much she had lost—how much she’d never be, or do, or have! How much she would never know! “Poor thing—she can’t help herself,” he had sighed so often when he thought of her. He hadn’t nerved himself to the point where he could send for her, and thus thought her visit showed the finger of Providence, much as his mother had.

Dora was inclined to argue against Addie, but he stopped it with a firm “Don’t leave her stay in here more’n a couple of minutes—you’ll know when I’ve said what I got to say, an’ you can hint to her to go without me hurtin’ her feelin’s.” And Dora brought her, making the baby’s fretfulness the excuse for leaving it with her mother.

More, even, than his mother or sister, Addie realized the immensity of the change in him and recoiled. It

simply wasn't Eric lying there, though she called him that, breaking into fresh tears and moaning: "Poor Eric! —Poor Eric!" "Husband," she couldn't have uttered —this gaunt, hollow-eyed man was no husband of hers, he looked too like his father, the only human being she had ever morally feared. James Feruseth had been her bogie-man since childhood, and the bogie feeling welled up in her at sight of this copy of him, and she could only sob and repeat, "Poor Eric! I didn't know!" with more genuine emotion than he at first gave her credit for.

He watched her for some moments in silence, seeing her through and through, confirming himself in his new estimates of her and her character; of the change in himself; of life's meanings and purposes; and the final product of his contemplation was a mild contemptuous pity—she seemed so trivial a thing, so small and inconsequent in meaning and purpose. He wondered if she really had a soul at all, or was just an animal.

When he spoke at last it was quietly and in full control of himself. "I guess us gettin' married was more of a mistake fer you than fer me—we didn't neither one of us understand the other—we come of different breeds, an' the breed's bound to tell, sooner er later. Y' can't git away from what's in yer blood and it couldn't of worked out between us noways so's you'd been happy with me long."

"Don't—don't!" she broke in, sobbing again to conceal her recognition of the truth of his words. "Don't think I wasn't happy with you—happy as I could of been with anybody with my—mean disposition and bad temper. I was." It was the most decent thing she had ever done in her life—she wouldn't let him die feeling he had not made her happy, and for the moment she convinced herself that he had.

He went on as soon as she took her handkerchief from her eyes: "But it's a mistake that'll soon be over. They have told you—how it is. There ain't nothing y' can do fer me now but jes' stay home quietly an' keep things goin' an'—wait till they send fer y' again. . . . Y' won't be left in want, er without a friend—Dora'll do fer you and the boy, fur as care an' support goes, all I could of done; she'll see that y' have plenty to live comfortable—she's promised me that—so y' don't need to worry about the future that way——"

"Oh, Eric!" she burst out, feeling a tremendous weight lift within her, yet fearful lest she show it. What news! If Dora had promised, Dora would perform—her word was solid as rock. With her own future thus unexpectedly provided for, Addie expostulated in the lightness of her heart: "Don't be talkin' about dyin'—you ain't dead yet—while thez life thez hope. We got years and years ahead of us yet——"

The rest of what she meant to say stopped short as she saw the queer smile on his face. It told her that all was over between them; they had irrevocably parted, body, mind, and spirit. Something in her breast suddenly sank; she felt lost, appalled. She knew that this was his farewell, and that he had left her and gone on to a world where she could not follow. Slow, bitter tears welled up—tears that seemed to come from some deep, unsuspected source. "Don't leave me, Eric," she whispered, holding out her hands to him, then letting them fall heavily in her lap.

As once before, gazing into each other's eyes above their child, their first golden moment had come to them, so, gazing into each other's eyes across the body of their dead hopes, came their last golden moment. The things of life had all failed them and fallen, but one thing remained—the simple, human bond between them,

stripped of everything: they were husband and wife. A pitying understanding entered their hearts; a tenderness toward the other's suffering; a yearning to console. A knowledge that words were powerless. "Poor child—poor child," his heart said to her, knowing that she was treading the thorny path of remorse, and knowing, too, that through her slow, unheeded tears, she was seeing a new dawn.

Dora watched her with barely concealed disgust, saying, "Crocodile tears! . . . Crocodile tears!" and noting Eric's sigh, his sudden whitening and look of exhaustion, she touched Addie on the shoulder with a short "Come now, please," and led her away, dazed, unresisting, without even a good-by.

The closing of the door upon his wife was to him the symbol of the closing of his earthly career. The vision of their last moment dulled; he remembered what she was and had been and felt a certain relief that their parting, such as it was, was over, and he kept on wondering, as he had been doing for weeks, what he had ever seen in her to make him want to be with her even for an hour.

"It's queer how a man is," he confided to Dora later. "First he's perfectly content with what a woman gives him—all he wants is to be hangin' round her and have her sorta make over him, be good to him, glad when he comes round, show she misses him. Pretty soon that don't satisfy him—he wants something she don't give him, an' he don't know jes' what it is she don't give him, neither;—he ain't satisfied, but still he can't break loose from her. He keeps hangin' on, thinkin' and hopin' things'll be diff'runt between 'em—git better instead o' worse; that she'll understand him better, do diff'runt, see diff'runt about things she does. Then all at oncet

he wants something entirely diff'runt from her—nothing she ever did give him, er ever could give him if she's to try; he wants something she *ain't*, and never could be—wants another woman altogether—one that's cool and far away, oh, so high above him he's got to look up to her!"

The first was simply the sex appeal, but Dora was too ignorant and too virgin of thought to appreciate it; the change he described she ascribed to his "getting out from under the influence of a woman like Addie and awakening to high things," and she answered him easily enough, "It's the soul he wants, then, and the things of the spirit," but only dimly understood. Few women ever do, or ever can understand this sharp line of demarcation the man draws between flesh and spirit; for maternity largely stills the craving for things that appeal to the senses only, or to the imagination only: women must have a working blend of flesh and spirit, with a leaning toward the higher side. Addie's attraction for her brother would be a mystery to Dora for all time; but nearly as great a mystery would be her own attraction for him. Always she had beckoned him onward to that cool, far-away world in which he seemed to see her dwelling, self-sustained, wide-visioning, remote, walking hand in hand with her own soul and her guardian angels. Oh, the white wonder of that soul! The capacity, the resourcefulness, the love ever enfold-ing him, and underneath it all the ineffable stillness of a soul secure in its purpose!

The nearer they grew in those quiet days, the more they felt souls as living presences—as a precious and important experience they had brought into each other's lives. They talked about souls almost as much as they talked about God and the unseen world—the world behind the veil, to which both knew, but neither would

admit to the other, he was very near—and he loved to have her read him Walt Whitman's poem beginning,

"Darest thou now O soul,
Walk with me toward the unknown region,
Where neither ground is for the feet nor any path to follow?"

and he pictured "the unknown region" as the plains spreading out in their eternal peace and solitude until they met the sky. If it were like that, how at home he'd feel as soon as he entered it! And yet how lonesome! He didn't want a lonesome heaven; still he hoped there wouldn't be such a crowd of saints and angels he couldn't find a corner for himself sometimes, there were so many things he wanted to think over, so much to learn. He was getting his first taste of the life of thought, of poetry, of creative imagination; a new world had opened to him with the books she read him by the hour—he had dipped into her "hidden pool" and at last he understood why she used to "go off and leave the family alone"; then the marvel was that she'd stayed with them at all, they had so little to give her, so much to take from her—to take away, just by keeping her there; but how wonderful that she could share it all with him, was so happy doing it, and every day she had something new, an inexhaustible store it would take them years to go through and get all the good out of. He liked the poems best; they seemed to say more in a few words even though he didn't always understand the words; but the roll and lilt seemed to carry him along, effortless, yet illuminated toward "the unknown region." For him it was now brightening with "the light that never was on land or sea"—the light within himself. It shed its rays outward, gilding the things of daily life with enlarged significances and new beauties that in turn reflected themselves into the unseen world, making

it familiar and homelike, a place of comforting companionship. His favorite poem of all, the one he asked for every day, was "Whispers of Heavenly Death"—

"Whispers of heavenly death murmured I hear,
Labial gossip of night, sibilant chorals,
Footsteps gently ascending, mystical breezes wafted soft and low,
Ripples of unseen rivers, tides of a current flowing, forever flowing,
(Or is it the plashing of tears? the measureless waters of human tears?)

"I see, just see skyward, great cloud-masses,
Mournfully slowly they roll, silently swelling and mixing,
With at times a half-dimm'd sadden'd far-off star,
Appearing and disappearing.
(Some parturition rather, some solemn immortal birth;
On the frontier to eyes impenetrable,
Some soul is passing over.)"

As he listened he felt an expansion within him, a sense of flight. Lying there looking out at the sky at dusk, he would murmur to himself when the stars one by one pricked through, "'Some soul is passing over'—as mine will soon," and sigh, and fall to wondering if his soul would *shine* in spite of everything. He hoped it would, and feared it wouldn't; otherwise he looked forward to death without fear—to him it now meant that all would be explained and forgiven by Posey, and everything else explained—the puzzle of circumstances, the meaning of wrong and suffering, even the reason why men lived on earth at all and endured these things—all would be made clear when he found God. In those gentle, fading hours the illumination that came to both brother and sister was that nothing after all really mattered but that: a realization that through pain, sorrow, sickness, misfortune, sin, there runs one golden thread,

and in spite of failures, of battles doomed to defeat, the soul finds its supreme task, its victory in finding its God and going through the world and into the great unknown hand in hand with him.

The finding came to Eric at last as a dissolving away of doubt, desire, remorse in a large security and peace, a sense of an abiding presence enfolding him, to whom his heart and all that he was yearned forth in a sigh: "I am ready!" Death was kinder to him than life, and took him gently while he slept.

THE END

